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Simon Dumenco
Dumenco has written for Esquire, New York and Rolling Stone and interviewed Philip Seymour Hoffman, Scarlett Johansson and Lou Reed, but **Dr. Jordan Peterson Makes His Rounds** marks the first time the writer-editor has profiled a university professor (or a fire-breathing Canadian, for that matter).

Walter Mosley
In Showdown on the Hudson, Mosley's take on the classic Western, black Texas cowboy Billy Consigas lands in Harlem, where he throws down for justice and, of course, a girl. The Grammy recipient and author of the hard-boiled Easy Rawlins series has a new standalone novel, John Woman, out in September from Atlantic Monthly Press.

Brian B Hayes
An internationally renowned photographer whose work is published worldwide. Brian is mostly known for his glamour style photography. With over 25 years of shooting gorgeous models Brian's work has graced the covers of top men's magazines worldwide. Brian also publishes a series of glamour calendars which are best sellers every year. You can find his work at BrianBHayes.com.

Ralph Nader
The author of our Politics page needs little introduction. In **Calling All Super-Voters,** the consumer advocate and former presidential candidate reaffirms the importance of voter education and accountability in the lead-up to the midterms. Nader's latest book, To **the Ramparts,** is out August 7 from Seven Stories Press.

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A Stoned Affair

Would you trade wedding-day champagne toasts for nuptial bong hits? Playboy.com met dozens of vendors who gathered at the first Cannabis Wedding Expo, held this year in Los Angeles, for a report on the rise of weed weddings.

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Mastodon Rising

Playboy.com's Chris Walker shadowed the Atlanta-bred fourpiece at a recent Red Rocks show and found that they're still experimenting—and affirming the importance of heavy metal. Not to miss: Jacki Vitetta's stunning photography.

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THE SEARCHER

Hot on the heels of Sicario, Hell or High Water and Wind River, ***Taylor Sheridan*** *turns the Western on its head*

BY **STEVE PALOPOLI**

It's cowboys and Indians all over again. Yellowstone, the flagship show of the Paramount Network (a rebrand of Spike TV), inevitably brings to mind that somewhat outdated phrase, but this time it's the cowboys who are desperately trying to protect their land, all 900,000 acres of it, from Native Americans who believe they now have manifest destiny on their side. And rather than engaging in outright warfare, the tribe's plan involves political intrigue, media spin and casino cash. Premiering June 20, Yellowstone turns the Western upside down and inside out. It follows a fictional ranching family in present-day Montana who will stop at nothing to maintain control of their holdings as they clash with a neighbouring reservation — as well as rapacious developers and meddling government officials. Although modernised and revisionist, Yellowstone also draws on many themes of the classic Western: families divided by politics and principles; chaos and uncertainty as one era of history ends and another begins; and a constant struggle over the last remaining frontiers. Which is why it must have come from the one guy in Hollywood who seems to understand how relevant those themes make the Western right now. Series creator Taylor Sheridan (pictured) — who wrote and directed all 10 episodes of Yellowstone's first season — has been circling the genre for the past few years, beginning in 2015 with his screenplay for the border drug-war thriller Sicario. (He also wrote the sequel, Sicario: Day of the Soldado, out June 29.) He dove deeper into Western themes with his Oscar-nominated script for 2016's Hell or High Water, as well as with 2017's Wind River, a murder mystery set on a Wyoming reservation, which he wrote

and directed. But with this show he fully embraces the uniquely American tradition, even as he subverts it. "I think Yellowstone, albeit modern-day, is probably the truest Western of them," says Sheridan. "I was a huge fan of Westerns as a kid—I still am. In my head I was saying, If John Ford came back to life today and wanted to do a series, how would he film it? I looked at The Searchers. I watched a number of his films. Fort Apache was extremely influential on the visual style of Yellowstone." Indeed, the series is packed with many of the visual and thematic touches that have become hallmarks of Sheridan's work, with claustrophobic physical and emotional standoffs between characters set against vast, sweeping landscapes. ("I try to really build on the fact that you can be backed into a corner on a 900,000-acre ranch," he says.) But it adds a new element: the classic Western patriarch. As played by Kevin Costner, John Dutton is the kind of antihero whose ruthless drive to dominate everything in sight somehow doesn't contradict his genuine heartbreak over being denied the chance to spend time with his only grandson.

"Take the characters in any of them, whether it's Sicario or Hell or High Water or Wind River. You're taking ordinary people and placing them in extraordinary circumstances," Sheridan says. "But if you think about the kind of person it takes to run, own and maintain an operation that massive, it has to be someone who has a politician's sense of swagger or charm or presence." Costner brings all three to Yellowstone. "There's no one else who could do this role," Sheridan says. "He's been doing this for, you know, 40 years. If you're doing something dumb, he will tell you it's dumb. And he'll probably be right." For the 48-year-old Sheridan, who broke into Hollywood as an actor on shows including Veronica Mars and Sons of Anarchy, the relevance of the modern-day Western hits close to home. "You write what you know, to a certain degree," he says. "I grew up in Texas. We had a ranch, and we lost that ranch. Elements of that influenced my life and writing." Even though he paints its characters in shades of grey rather than stark black and white, Sheridan is up-front about the fact that his sympathies don't lie with the ranchers on Yellowstone. He thinks the show's Indian Nation, whose claim to the land is older than the Duttons', is most justified in its actions. In the aftermath of Native American – led protests against the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines, it's an urgent message: If Westerns are going to get their much-deserved comeback, it's high time the Indians won.

WHERE THERE'S A GRILL, THERE'S A WAY

You've mastered steaks, burgers and corn; now upgrade your grill skills by expanding your repertoire

BY **MACKENZIE FEGAN**

There is nothing primal about an Instant Pot. And with summer on the wing, it's time to embrace your inner cave dweller and cook with fire. For next-level grilling, think beyond the usual suspects and reach for unorthodox ingredients that can benefit from smoke and scorch. Just as the high heat of glowing charcoal can yield a hard-seared steak that's still bloody on the inside, a charred tomato or cucumber will serve up those rich, browned flavours without sacrificing peak-produce juiciness. As for smoke, treat it like an extra ingredient. To lock in its flavour, fat is your friend, as in chef Galen Zamarra's butter-topped oysters (pictured, with recipe below, along with other tips from some of our favourite chefs). You won't get blazing hot temperatures or that ideal smokiness from a gas grill—though wood chips can be used as a cheat—so if you came to play, it's charcoal all the way (and we mean hardwood lump charcoal, not chemical-laced briquettes). You go, grill.

Tomatoes: Toss cocktail or cherry tomatoes with olive oil and place on grill (a colander or grill basket is helpful) for about five minutes, until they blister open. Puree and season with salt. Spoon over steamed clams with garlic, oregano and Tabasco, or use instead of lemon in sauces and dressings for a smoky, acidic kick. *(Ashley Rath, the Grill, New York)*

Soft-shell crabs: Place boiled soft-shell crabs on grill over direct heat, allowing shells to char but not burn—eight to 10 seconds per side. Move crabs to cooler side of grill until warmed through, three to five minutes. Place in a large mixing bowl, toss with Old Bay seasoning and serve with melted butter. *(Elise Kornack, former Take Root chef whose new project launches next year in the Catskills)*

Leeks: Trim leeks and wash well. Place over direct heat on grill for five to 10 minutes, letting outer layer blacken. Peel away and discard charred outer layer. Top leeks with Parmesan or pecorino, cracked black pepper and a runny fried egg. *(Elizabeth Haigh, Shibui, London)*

Beef heart: Cut heart into quarter-inch slices and thread on wooden skewers. Marinate in neutral oil, vinegar, salt, pepper, cumin, garlic and aji panca (a mild, fruity Peruvian pepper) for two hours in refrigerator. Grill until medium, three to five minutes, brushing with leftover marinade. Serve skewers topped with salsa. *(Erik Ramirez, Llama Inn, Brooklyn)*

Fennel: Halve a fennel bulb and grill five minutes per side over direct heat. Slice crosswise and mix with supremed orange wedges, Castelvetrano olives, high quality olive oil, chardonnay vinegar, tarragon and mint. Season with salt and red chilli flakes. *(Negro Piattoni, Mettā, Brooklyn)*

Oysters: Make a mignonette compound butter by mixing sautéed shallots, lemon zest and thyme into softened butter. Chill until solid. Shuck medium-size, meaty oysters, being careful not to spill juices. For each oyster, place half a teaspoon of compound butter on the meat and replace the top shell. Grill over in direct heat until the butter melts and the oyster is just warmed through, about three minutes. Finish with a squeeze of lemon. *(Galen Zamarra, Mas, New York)*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GRANT CORNETT**

A Polyamory Primer

You've thought about it, dreamed about it, maybe even dabbled in it—but are you brave enough to manage multiple intimate relationships? We're here to help

WORDS AND ILLUSTRATION BY
SOPHIE LUCIDO JOHNSON

You know the line. In one form or another, it has graced virtually every romantic comedy since the days of Shakespeare. It's spoken by a friend on the night before the hero of the story is to be married.

"Well," says the friend, "this is your last night as a free man."

I can think of nothing bleaker than the idea that wanting to share a life with someone should be synonymous with losing one's freedom. Humans follow these rules because, at some point, humans made these rules. And we're just as capable of breaking them.

Polyamory, according to an early definition, is "the practice, state or ability of having more than one sexual loving relationship at the same time, with the full knowledge and consent of all partners involved." Note the emphasis on "full knowledge and consent." This is not sleeping around, "keeping things casual" or cheating. This is an arrangement in which the rules are malleable, and it involves a lot—like, a lot—of talking.

The practice of polyamory is nothing new—in America it dates back to at least the 1800s—but it's enjoying a resurgence. Couples are waiting to get married (or are not marrying at all), they're having children later in life (or not at all), and fewer children than in previous generations are being raised in heterosexual, two-parent households. As the typical modern family changes, so do the expectations around relationships.

My partner and I are polyamorous. We're committed to each other, but the commitment is not about sex; it's a promise to emotionally support each other throughout our lives. We date and sleep with other people, and we tell each other about all of it. When I talk to people about our relationship, they'll often say, "I don't think I could do that; I'd get too jealous." And I relate: I am not free of jealousy. But the thing about jealousy is that with a lot of honest conversation, it can change—and fade.

I'm not suggesting that polyamorous relationships are easier than monogamous ones. If you're going to pursue love, you have to decide what you're willing to sacrifice: In a traditional relationship, you sacrifice the possibility of ever sleeping with anyone else again; in a polyamorous one, you sacrifice the comforting idea that your relationship structure will always stay the same. I vastly prefer the latter sacrifice; it's a good psychological exercise, and I ultimately learn more about myself. But polyamory isn't right for everyone. In a poly relationship, you have to work through jealousy rather than around it. I find that this—the practice of feeling my feelings and being conversational about them—brings me a lot closer to my partners.

A common fear around polyamory is that your partner will fall in love with someone else and you might lose them. Here's the bottom line: Your partner might fall in love with someone else, and you might lose the structure of the relationship you're in right now. Think of it this way: Parents with multiple children can love all their offspring equally, if in different ways, and the same is possible for romantic love. As long as all partners in a polyamorous configuration are transparent about their thoughts and feelings throughout a relationship, a shift in its structure shouldn't come as a surprise. That doesn't mean it doesn't hurt, but it shouldn't traumatise anyone.

If you're interested in opening up your relationship, prepare to experience some tough feelings and take partial ownership of the equally tough feelings of your partner. One of the biggest newbie mistakes when it comes to polyamory is defensiveness: If your partner feels jealous that you're spending time with someone new, your impulse might be to accuse them of overreacting. The best advice I've received about dating multiple people is that if one person is hurting, it's up to everyone else to nurture that person. Sometimes that isn't what you want to do — but it makes all the difference.

I want to briefly add that my sex life is amazing. I've lived out every sexual fantasy I've ever had, and now I'm working on developing new ones. The key is to get tested any time you engage with a new partner or partners and to be open and up-front with all your partners about sexual health. Also, condoms. Lots and lots of condoms.

Are Open Relationships Right for You?

A deeply committed open relationship may be for you. Talk to your significant other about people you'd like to see or sexual fantasies you'd like to explore, but understand your partner's limits and feelings. Carve out time to deal with the jealousy that will naturally arise. And make sure your current relationship is stable enough to withstand some big change.

You're all about the bedroom; ain't nothing wrong with that! Make sure you're up-front and 100 percent honest about what you want—sex, sex and lots of sex—and then enjoy physical relationships with people who want the same thing. Get tested regularly and use multiple forms of protection. Have fun! Sex is the best.

You believe in structure and loyalty, and that's beautiful. Jealousy is detrimentally intense for you; the solution, once again, is to communicate at every turn. Carry on your search for the One! If you've found him or her, honor and fight for that singular bond. Monogamy seems to be working just fine for half the population, if the divorce rate is any indicator.

8

ANA ESPINOLA

Photography by **@CARLOSMDLFOTO** *Make-up by* **@HUGOQUINONEZMAKEUP**

Text by **NELLY MADUNA**

Ana Espinola is a glamour model, playmate, athlete, and fitness model. Born in Paraguay in the city Asuncion, the 28-year-old world-renowned Ana Espinola first started her modelling career as a hobby at 19 years old on the catwalk, while her main career was accountancy.

Tell us something surprising about you
I am half Italian, addicted to extreme sports, and I can eat a whole pepperoni pizza.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Yes, super excited. I still feel flattered to have the tittle of playmate, shooting totally naked was quite an experience.

What inspires you?
Traveling and fitness inspire me.

What are some of your hobbies?
Traveling, shopping, yoga, and cooking.

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
Un puño de tierra by Antonio Aguilar.

What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
Amor, meaning love. I think love is the quintessence of life.

Turn-ons
I love it when a man tries to conquer me. Details are everything so is someone caring and definitely someone with attitude. I get really attracted to smart conversations, lol also I will say high standards and guys with tattoos are definitely hot.

Turn-offs
Selfishness and no manners.

Describe to us your perfect date
Romantic dinner with a nice wine.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why?
Paris. I would love to go Champs-Élysées to enjoy good champagne and food of course.

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
Thank you for your support in my career, don't miss my road to Ms Olympia.

الحب يفوز على كل شيء، قادر على تجاوز كل
شيء، لأن الحب هو جوهر الحياة

By **STEVE PALOPOLI**

For the past decade, producer ***Jason Blum*** has been stretching budgets and the allegorical potential of horror cinema. Can he survive the glare of Get Out's success?

CAUTIONARY TALES

Get Out may have garnered more critical acclaim, Paranormal Activity may have raked in more dollars and Split may have ginned up more buzz for its jaw-dropping twist, but the heart and soul of Blumhouse Productions is arguably the series that began with 2013's The Purge. That may be because Blumhouse founder Jason Blum sees The Purge the same way he sees himself — as an underdog with something to prove and even more to say. "People don't see it in the United States," says Blum of the barbed thread of social commentary that runs through the Purge saga. "In France, The Purge was called American Nightmare. In Europe, people understand because they're not insane about guns. They understand how crazy our gun laws are, and they totally understand The Purge as a cautionary tale."

Keep in mind, he's referring to a series that has made almost $216 million in the U.S. over three films with a combined budget of $22 million. But it's not just about the money. As they've gotten better with each sequel, the Purge films have shown that Blum's devotion to darkly allegorical stories told by unknown talents can actually work out for everyone involved—especially the moviegoing public. Written and directed by James DeMonaco, the first Purge movie had a killer hook—a totalitarian regime called the New Founding Fathers of America has declared an annual tradition during which all crime is legal (except for the murder of a politician, of course) for 12 hours—but devolved in the second half into home-invasion cliché. Over the course of two sequels, however, DeMonaco dug deeper into the festering class tensions probed in the first film and delivered the kind of politically freighted action-horror mini-masterpieces that no one has pulled off since John Carpenter in his prime.

A prequel, The First Purge, arrives on July 4. Written by DeMonaco, this instalment is directed by up-and-comer Gerard McMurray, the African American filmmaker whose Burning Sands touched off controversy for its portrayal of hazing at black fraternities. The new film, set on the night of the very first Purge, follows a group of African American characters as they discover the deadly (well, more deadly) conspiracy at the centre of the New Founding Fathers' social experiment. "In the last movie, James somehow foresaw Trump getting elected, which was pretty incredible," says Blum. "But with the next movie, we move from kind of a class war to a race war." Blum has gravitated toward unique cinematic visions ever since he secured financing for 1995's Kicking and Screaming (the winsome post-college comedy, not the Will Ferrell vehicle). He launched Blumhouse in 2000 and, nine years later, homed in on horror with his first big success, Oren Peli's micro-budget shocker Paranormal Activity. "I was very lucky that Paranormal happened when it did," says Blum. "I was doing different things in the movie business, and I couldn't find my niche. I spent 15 years half in studio production and half in independent. I loved independent production, but I hated independent distribution. Paranormal Activity was a totally independently produced movie released by a very traditional big studio." That became Blum's model, and the roster of auteurs he has backed over the past decade is a testament to his eye for singular filmmaking talent. Case in point: His ability to understand what's important about their work is the reason Get Out was successfully marketed as piercing social commentary rather than B-grade horror. "I really do bet on people," says Blum. "What I like is going to an undervalued talent and trying to edge them into more commercial territory." Lest anyone cry "sellout," consider the fiery national discussion sparked by Get Out.

When Jordan Peele accepted the Oscar for best original screenplay earlier this year, it seemed to mark the fulfilment of Blum's dream for his horror hit factory. And with an upcoming slate of films that includes Glass, the Unbreakable threequel from M. Night Shyamalan; an offbeat sequel to Halloween; Spike Lee's BlacKkKlansman; and Todd McFarlane's Spawn, Blumhouse has some true "event" movies on the way. But Blum says that while the company will continue to evolve, it won't abandon its core mission. "Everyone asks, 'Now that you've made Get Out, are you going to go make Oscar movies?' The answer is definitely not. I really like feeling like an outsider, an underdog," he says. "The last thing I'm looking for is the next Get Out."

AUTEURS 'R' US

A handful of the best (and weirdest) filmmakers Jason Blum has backed

Noah Baumbach: Five years before starting Blumhouse Productions, Blum helped Baumbach, his college roommate, get financing for his first film, Kicking and Screaming. Part of Blum's strategy was to attach to the script a letter of endorsement from family friend Steve Martin before sending it around Hollywood.

James Wan and Leigh Whannell: This directing-writing pair, who scored a huge hit with 2004's Saw but were dogged by its (somewhat undeserved) "torture porn" rep, found redemption with their hit series of Insidious films (top left) for Blumhouse.

Damien Chazelle: A jazz film is the last thing one would expect from Blumhouse, but Blum produced Chazelle's acclaimed 2014 Whiplash (right).

Scott Derrickson: The director and co-writer of Blumhouse's massively profitable Sinister (and co-writer of its sequel) went on to direct Marvel's Doctor Strange.

Jordan Peele: Previously best known as a sketch comedian, Peele worried that his directorial debut would fail. Instead, produced by Blumhouse for $4.5 million, Get Out (lower left) went on to earn $255 million worldwide and bag four Oscar nominations.

ILLUSTRATION BY **WEBUYYOURKIDS**

GO, GO ZOMBIE RACER ANDROID

Zombie hordes, android dreams and heart-pounding races await you.

By Andre Coetzer

STATE OF DECAY 2

The ultimate “Walking Dead” simulator is back with its highly anticipated sequel. Originally released in 2013, State of Decay was a fun, yet flawed adventure game. This time around there is no singular hero character, it’s all about your community.

Each survivor is their own person, with a unique mix of background traits, skills and attitudes. Using these unique individual attributes, it’s up to you to keep the peace and make sure the community survives. Perma-death is a very real threat in State of Decay 2, send your favourite character out to scavenge medicine and if unprepared chances are your character will die and be gone forever. It does make each excursion out into the world a tense affair, with death creeping around every corner.

The world itself is infested with dynamic zombies and human enemies, but also friendly survivors to recruit to your community, with each interaction shaping the future of your survival. Ignore a friendly survivor’s request for food and chances are next time you meet they might not be so friendly. For the first time in the franchise’s short history, you can invite friends to join your game, allowing for extremely fun adventures with your best pals, smashing zombies and arguing over the last med pack. It adds a whole new level to the game and it is an incredibly welcome addition. Sadly the game is filled with bugs but hopefully Undead Labs can sort that out with future patches.

The graphics as well aren’t quite on par with current gen games and one does feel that maybe a bit more time could’ve been spent on the world and character animations. However, if surviving the zombie apocalypse with friends is high on your to-do list then State of Decay 2 comes highly recommended, especially at its budget price.

STATE OF DECAY 2

DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN

The year is 2038 and the city of Detroit has become a futuristic metropolis, rejuvenated by the introduction of advanced androids that exist only to serve mankind. Of course not everything is what it seems and the peace is about to be shattered. Detroit: Become Human is the latest release from Quantic Dreams, creators of Heavy Rain and Beyond: Two Souls and it asks the big question, what does it mean to be human? To answer that question you step into the shoes of three distinct android characters as the brave new world is carefully balanced on the brink of chaos. As Connor, you're the top of the line prototype android, investigating crime scenes and disturbances across Detroit, Markus is the polar opposite and will spark the fire that could lead to an android insurrection and Kara, a defective yet operational android trapped in the middle of it all.

This game is all about the choices you make and how it will affect the world around you. Your choices shape the ambitious branching narrative, where the actions you take, not only affects your three main characters but the entire city of Detroit. How you control Kara, Connor and Marcus can mean life or death and if one of them pays the ultimate price, then the story will continue without them.

This mechanic allows for some truly tense and incredibly tough decisions, do you allow the little girl to die to save yourself or do you save her but put your own survival at risk? Those looking for fast-paced action will be disappointed, Detroit: Become Human is a slow paced, choice-driven adventure with scattered puzzles across the world. It's all about the choices you make and some of the options are tougher than any Dark Souls boss.

THE CREW 2

Every petrolhead has dreamt of driving across the USA from coast to coast, seeing the epic sights and experiencing the long flat roads of America. Well, that dream is about to come true thanks to the latest racing offering from Ubisoft.

The Crew 2 celebrates the American motorsport spirit as you explore and dominate the land, air and sea of the United States in perhaps the most detailed and expansive open world to date. With a wide variety of exotic cars, bikes, boats and planes to choose from, The Crew 2 brings to life the excitement of competing across the entire USA as you test your skills in a wide range of driving disciplines.

From street racing, off-road, pro racing and freestyle, the options are endless and with a map that stretches across the entire continent, finding an adrenaline rush is as easy as American Pie. The map is broken up into four segments, The West, Midwest, The South and The East Coast, each with its own challenges and boss-type characters. Finishing these challenges and taming the bosses will allow you to buy even better vehicles and upgrade your ride to the extreme.

As with most games these days, multiplayer is where the true fun lies, with players easily dropping in and out of a friend's game and challenging the best from all over the world. It's perhaps one of the most ambitious titles yet and it's staggering how much there is to do. The world itself also looks amazing and driving around some of the most famous landmarks is truly a sight to behold. Racing fans of any form will find nothing but fun and excitement with The Crew 2.

GRIP OR SLIP

BMW's M5 has supercar performance, now also in the corners.

By John Page

"M division has no technological dogma." That's what Men's Fitness learned when we sat down with the CEO a few months before the reveal of the M5 super saloon. Perpetual innovation, is how M-Division stays ahead whether it's through the judicious use of carbon fibre, a suite of turbocharged engines, or in the case of the M5, all-wheel-drive – the first time any one of BMW's

M-Division cars has evolved away from rear-wheel-drive.

Why? Because there's no compromise yet there's superior driveability in all conditions. It's the work of technology, obviously, embedded in M xDrive's software with your preference enabled from the central screen. The brilliance lies in the ability to make micro changes – and there's a pure rear-wheel-drive M5 in there too. Fast and fun, with a greater usability. Which is key for the M5 as a family car, able to march through the miles in comfort, then, uncannily quickly transform with the straight-line speed of a supercar.

DYNAMIQUE HATCH

A shift from niche to mainstream as Megane becomes an all-rounder

A 5-door fast Renault hatch. That sentence doesn't mean a lot at first but it's crucial if Renault wants in on the same market share as the Golf GTi – which is only sold as a 5-door model in South Africa. The latest Megane RS is therefore a car born from intensive market research. But Renault isn't copying the market leader because features such as 4-wheel steering (for better agility and stability) is cutting-edge hardware none of its competitors can claim to match.

A smaller 1.8-litre turbocharged replaces the 2.0-litre for better fuel consumption and emissions. Still, it's befitting of an RS model with similar power to its bigger brethren but the biggest contributor to the 0-100km/h improvement is the dual-clutch automatic gearbox. Another reason why Renault will finally be able to mount a serious challenge on Golf is because of the automatic option not previously offered.

Inside it's quality materials with just the right amount of sportiness to the way the seats hold you and the thick flat-bottom wheel slides through your hands. A unique addition to the plethora of touchscreen-options is the live telemetry for those track occasional track days.

A faster Trophy version could arrive later this year but for now we'd recommend the Cup version for the limited slip differential. Power becomes unruly without it...

IMOGEN JAMES

Photography by **MIKE COHEN** *Text by* **NELLY MADUNA**

Tell us something surprising about you?
I'm a bit of a tom boy and a total geek. Most people don't think it when they look at me but there is nothing more I enjoy than to get lost in a box set for hours on end or to log in online on my Xbox.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Excited is an understatement. Ever since I started modelling last August, it was my dream to shoot for Playboy and I am ecstatic to finally make my dream come true.

What inspires you?
My friends, family and other creative, hardworking, positive people in the modelling industry inspire me to work hard and follow my dreams. I believe you are what you surround yourself with. Always avoid negativity and stay true to yourself.

What are some of your hobbies?
Including modelling, I work in London as a Babe-show host. When I am not working you can find me chilling to a good binge on Netflix or spending time with family and friends.

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
Hans Zimmer - Time. It is from one of my favourite films, Inception. The sound track to the film itself is amazing but this one is a very powerful and emotional song.

What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
Orphic. It is Latin for mysterious and entrancing, beyond ordinary and understanding.

Turn-ons
I love people with a sense of humour. It's so important to enjoy all the good things life has to offer. Loyalty, kindness, confidence and originality are always a major turn on for me. There is nothing worse than someone pretending to be something they are not.

Turn-offs
I can't stand rude manners. It takes less than a second to say please and thank you. Jealousy, laziness and negativity are such ugly traits. Good vibes only please.

Describe to us your perfect date
Depending on the time of year, a summer date would be a day out to the zoo or theme park, followed by a meal at an Italian Restaurant. Then in winter the perfect date would include a scary film at the cinema followed by eating takeaway snuggled up on the sofa at home.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why?
Australia is on my bucket list of places I want to visit. It is such a massive country and there are so many beautiful places to see. I want to hold a Koala bear and go diving in the great barrier reef.

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
I love getting to know my fans. If you have any more questions or would like to know more about me then follow me on Instagram @Imogen_James

Calling All *Super-Voters*

With the midterms drawing near, one of America's most influential thinkers echoes FDR's maxim that the real safeguard of democracy is education

BY **RALPH NADER**

I'm writing these words almost exactly 50 years after I sat for my first Playboy Interview. It took place at the Washington Hilton hotel; below us, Connecticut Avenue was full with cars fleeing the fiery protests immediately following the slaying of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. The civil rights movement produced historic levels of activism and voter engagement, and many political observers believe the upcoming midterm elections will spark a new round of both. The obstacles to political action in the current political moment are significant but not insurmountable.

Over the past five decades we've seen ever-expanding control by global corporations over governments, technology, media, capital and labour. Changes have occurred in these areas that few would have anticipated, but the huge number of cynical nonvoters or poorly informed active ones has not significantly declined. The turnout of the voting-age population has been below 60 percent since 1968. And voters today, beset by even more issues, are relatively less informed than they were back then, despite the vast resources of the internet, live coverage of Congress by C-SPAN and instant free access to voting records.

Voter turnout in America is the lowest in the Western world. In some countries, such as Australia, voting is a duty. The United States is one of the few democracies in which voter registration is not automatic. To make matters worse, gerrymandering by both major parties is widespread, allowing politicians to pick their voters.

It's easy to demonstrate, starting with a weaker, corporatised Congress, that lawmakers are now more indentured to vested interests and less reflective of the people's necessities and need for justice than 50 years ago. The corporate state's attack on the poor, on labor, on consumer and environmental justice keeps expanding as companies export jobs, avoid taxes and profitably invade our privacy. Even state judicial elections are being corrupted with money: A report by the American Constitution Society titled "Justice at Risk" found a "significant relationship between business-group contributions to state supreme court justices and the voting of those justices in cases involving business matters. The more campaign contributions from business interests justices receive, the more likely they are to vote for business litigants appearing before them in court."

What about training yourself to become a super-voter — a voter who can't be outsmarted by the cleverest of smooth-talking politicians? You can start by recognising a fundamental fact: The Constitution starts with "We the People," not "We the Congress" or "We the Corporations." As a republic, we delegate power to elected representatives to govern, but ultimately we are the sovereign power. We can take this power back fast. Start by showing up—which is half of democracy. Show up to vote, to run referenda, to attend town meetings, rallies, marches and, sometimes, to present citizen petitions summoning your lawmakers to your own meetings to address your agenda. Organisers from Indivisible, a progressive nonprofit, have developed a variety of tools to help citizens hold members of Congress accountable. Its "Missing Members of Congress Action Plan" provides useful suggestions for motivating elected representatives to talk with the citizenry.

Avoid being a single-issue advocate, which politicians know how to handle. Instead present several popular redirections, from electoral reforms to improvements for workers, consumers and the environment, upgraded infrastructure and a smarter military and foreign policy. Politicians will realise you've done your homework. They'll sense that you aren't going away and that you're likely to have broad public support.

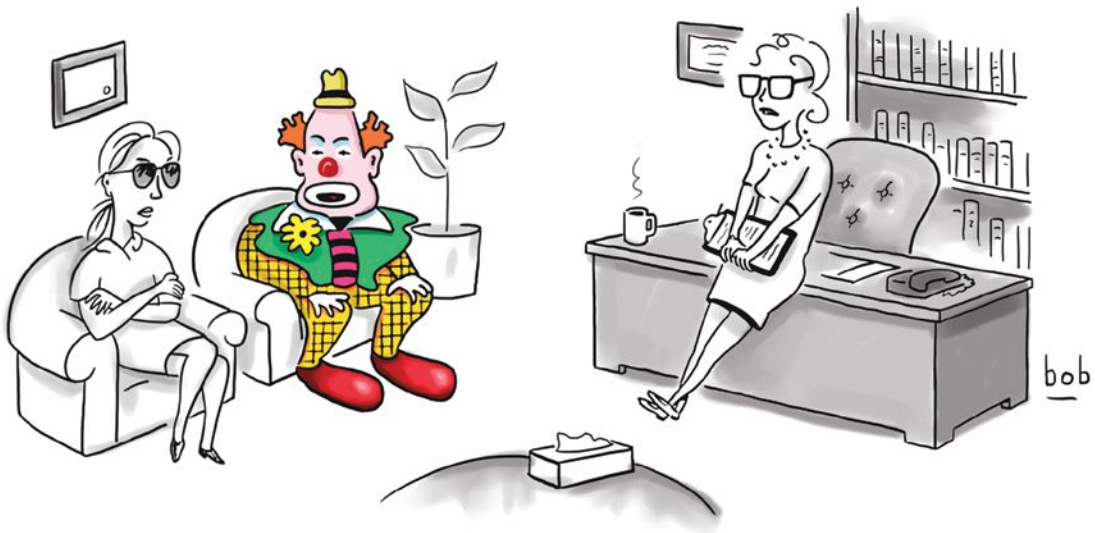
Hand your elected officials a voter self-help guide that lists where you stand in contrast to where the candidates stand or have avoided the issues. This juxtaposes your positions with theirs in a concise, personal manner. It will be difficult for them to sloganise their way out of addressing your concerns. They know that asking knowledgeable, tough questions is itself power, especially when you can publicise your positions on social media.

When they talk of starting wars, such as the undeclared criminal war of aggression against Iraq, you can ask, "What's your legal authority to do this under our Constitution and laws?" Many of these military actions are not legal — and both parties are guilty. As Yale law professor Bruce Ackerman wrote in The New York Times, "The legal machinations Mr. Obama has used to justify war without Congressional consent set a troubling precedent that could allow future administrations to wage war at their convenience—free of legislative checks and balances." Truth be known, politicians are most fearful of questions from 10-year-olds, such as "Why are you taking money from polluters?" or "Why do you have health insurance and we don't?" Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida have made politicians answer tough questions about gun control. Learn from them.

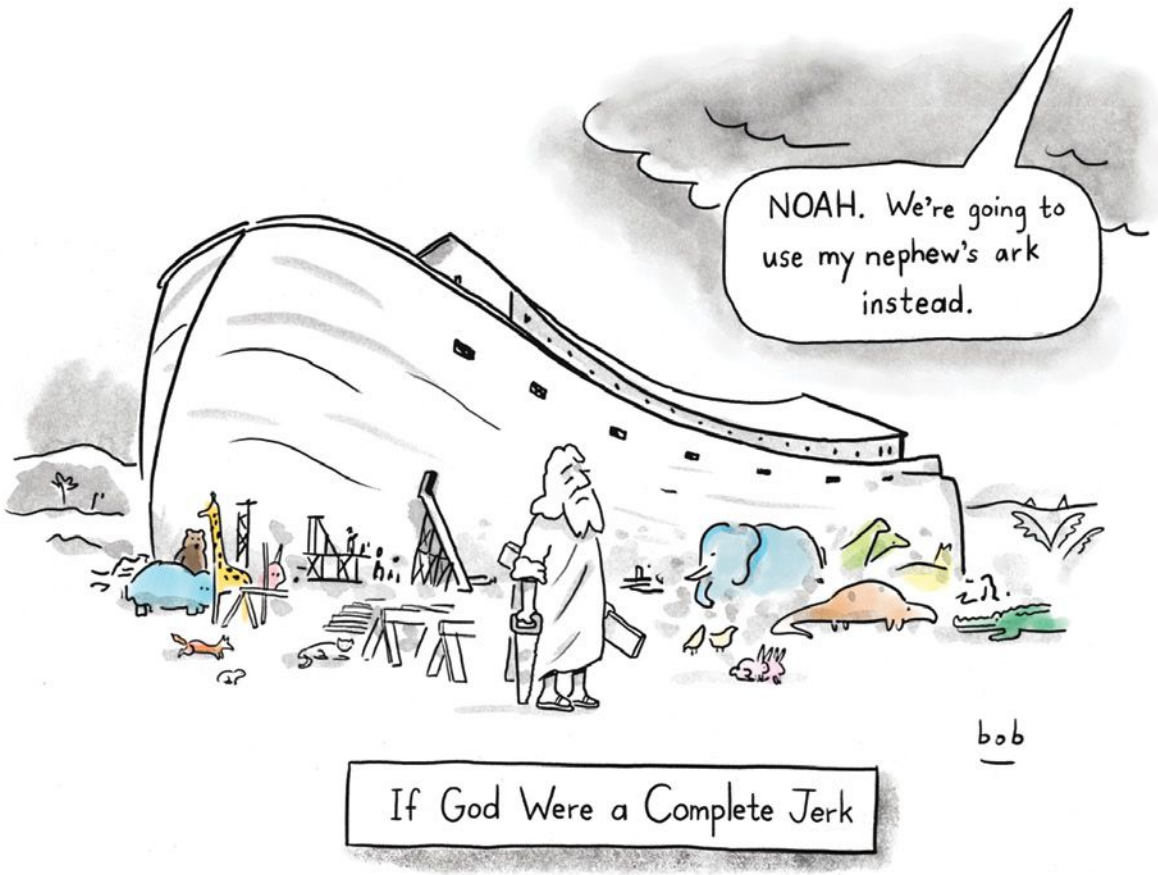
You have time to be a smart voter. You need only 10 to 20 hours of study between Labor Day and the midterms to absorb the necessary facts to choose candidates who will do right and not betray you—or you can write in your own candidate as a protest vote. And if you ever doubt your power, consider this: As I describe in my book Breaking Through Power, one percent or less of the voters in a congressional district can be the deciding factor in a serious push for changes backed by a majority opinion; that's true regardless of the corporate lobbies.

We live in a country that has far more problems than we deserve and far more solutions than we apply. It's time to hold up standards that will shift power back to "We the People."

ILLUSTRATION BY **TOM TORO**



"What you call bad sex, I call physical comedy."



Playboy Advisor

Sex columnist **Anna del Gaizo** goes long on male pubic hair. Plus, how to handle those sex tapes you made with your ex, a guide to lovemaking al fresco and more

Q: While the stigma of being "metrosexual" really doesn't exist anymore, I'm still not sure what the hell to do with my pubes. Do women expect me to have them buzzed down to nothing now? The last woman I was with made a face when she saw how much pubic hair I have, and now I'm rethinking the whole situation.—J.F., Mankato

ILLUSTRATION BY **ZOHAR LAZAR**

A: Like your preferred sleeping position or Chipotle order, pubic-hair grooming is highly subjective. That said, an all-natural approach is almost antiquated at this point. Most of us are in favour of partial or complete elimination, for aesthetic or hygienic reasons or both. A lot of women wonder why we should be bombarded with fuzz when we're expected to maintain a sleek landing strip or be preternaturally smooth everywhere — but spite aside, few people like to plunge face-first into a mouthful of shrubbery because (a) it's distracting and (b) it makes our work more difficult. The first time I encountered a guy who was completely shaved, I thought, This is fucking weird. Eventually, it grew on me, so to speak, and I realised it makes for easy, clean access. Converted!

Don't feel you need to give yourself a buzz cut, but it would be wise to trim as part of your regular routine. Any awkwardly long, wayward hairs poking out? Banish them. If your bush is so bountiful it competes with your dick — say, if hairs are rising well into the shaft region — deal with it. Just use a pair of clippers, fine scissors or a proper body-hair groomer (like the Philips Norelco Bodygroom 7100). Proceed with caution, especially around your balls. Finally, consider the possibility that you misread the woman's expression and you're fine. But are you comfortable? You'll never please everyone, so groom or don't groom your pubes to the length and expanse that make you happy.

Q: *My boyfriend gets jealous if I hang out with other women. This is because I once admitted to him that I've messed around with a number of same-sex partners, but I'm definitely straight. That is, I'm not sexually attracted to women; I'm just open to experimentation. The jealousy rears its head whenever I make a new female friend or we're out and I'm spending more time with my girlfriends than with him. In those cases, his behaviour becomes part territorial, part baby-sitter. How can I convince him that his jealousy is misplaced? — B.P., Lafayette*

A: If a man is threatened by his straight girlfriend having female friends, imagine what else threatens him. Jealousy is the result of a sense of ownership, which means your boyfriend is, on some level, worried that one of these femmes fatales will take away what rightfully belongs to him: you. Jealousy also stems from deep-rooted insecurity that likely has nothing to do with your behaviour. So what if you've gone down on a couple of ladies? A similar situation in one of his previous relationships might be the culprit. Either way, the dude has issues with women and he's misdirecting his mistrust, scrambling for a place to apply his fear and resentment. It's safe to say he's also pissed that he's not receiving the bulk of your attention. Is he a charismatic type with a strong personality? Thought so. But just because he's charming doesn't mean he's confident. You probably won't be able to convince him his jealousy is misplaced, because his feelings are irrational — and when logic retreats, so does hope. Besides, if your significant other can't be happy that you're enjoying downtime with your friends, then he doesn't deserve to enjoy downtime with you. Tell him to drop the bratty bullshit. If he doesn't, dump him and get with a real man—or woman, for that matter.

Q: *Is it unhealthy that I don't want to delete a bunch of homemade sex videos of my ex and me because I like to masturbate to them? We were together only six months, so I don't have a ton of residual feelings for her, and our breakup wasn't heartbreaking (that I'm aware of), but could this create problems for me down the road?—T.D., Berlin*

A: First off, are you currently in a relationship? If you are, and you continue to invite your ex to your personal party, then, yes, obviously there's a problem — and you'll surely have a bigger one down the road, particularly if your new girlfriend should stumble into your phone's photo app. (And by "stumble," I mean "break into it the moment it's unlocked and you're not looking." People can sense these things.) If you're single, then, hey, no damage done. It's your amateur porn and you can watch it as frequently and ferociously as you damn well please—unless your favourite video vixen explicitly told you to delete the content, in which case you need to get rid of it out of respect for her. Just make sure you can get off without the assistance of your homemade films and that they're not causing you to blow off plans with prospective partners. Keep your viewing sessions infrequent, and mix up your masturbation routine by watching porn you didn't direct and star in yourself. Better yet, use your imagination.

Q: *I keep having sex with a woman I don't really like. It happens when I'm bored — or drunk. I'm not attracted to her, and the sex is mediocre at best. She, on the other hand, says I'm the best she's ever had, and I think that's because she's in love with me. I can't tell if I'm doing it out of pity, insecurity or basic boredom. I don't need advice on how to simply "break it off" — as soon as I start actually dating, that will be it — but I could use some insight into why I keep doing this.—S.G.*

A: Poor girl. Poor you. Poor everyone involved in this labyrinth of unrequited lust, misdirected affection and overabundant cocktails. Boredom is a genuine reason we do a lot of dumb shit, like drop molly alone on a Sunday afternoon or sign up to be a webcam model (speaking on behalf of a friend, of course). But it's not the only reason. I sense a measure of guilt and, yes, insecurity.

Admit it: You like the adoration. It's simultaneously safe and liberating to have sex with someone you have this kind of power over. And it's nice to have a woman on reserve, particularly when your self-esteem has taken a beating and you're a little horny. Even if you're not into the sex, you're getting off on the psychological elements in play. That, and you might have a smidge of a drinking problem. Are you drinking to make it easier to have sex with her, or are you having sex with her because you're drunk? Only you can answer that. Ask more questions while you're at it. Is it possible that deep down you think you don't deserve to be with someone you're attracted to? Are you afraid of experiencing the vulnerability that comes with actually caring? Traumatised from a previous relationship when you were the one who loved harder and got burned? Clearly you're not doing this out of some profound unconscious love for her, but it may have to do with an unconscious lack of love for yourself.

Q: *I'm going camping this summer with some friends, including a woman I've been flirting with for months. I think we'll finally do the deed, but I've never had sex outdoors before. Any tips? — B.V., Ludington*

A: When it comes to sex in the wild, for every unfettered pleasure, there's a mosquito swarm, poison ivy bush or black bear cameo. The key is to embrace it all. Don't think of it as a war against nature but a union of romance and the great outdoors. Isn't the goal of camping to revel in the primal glory of living beyond civilization for a couple of days?

If you plan on keeping your escapades relegated to a tent, don't get busy on an air mattress; the sound of your bodies squeaking is a real mood killer. If you're more adventurous, sneak away to a remote area, pick her up like the almighty outdoorsman you are, ask her to wrap her legs around you, and go at it standing up. It's super hot, and you'll have minimal contact with leaves, soil and all the other stuff you don't want up your butt crack. That said, it's crucial that you get dirty, in every sense of the word. Good sex is worth a few bug bites, and wanting someone so bad you don't care about the repercussions can result in epic sex.
Questions? E-mail advisor@playboy.com.

THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON JOKES

Scientists have scanned the brains of comedians and found that they're basically addicts

BY **ERIC SPITZNAGEL**

Ori Amir has always been fascinated with how a comedian's brain works. "There's been so much research about what goes on in the brain when you enjoy humour," says the neuroscientist, who moved to the U.S. from Israel to study at the University of Southern California. "But nobody has looked at the neural activity that happens when you try to come up with a joke."

So Amir and Irving Biederman, professor of psychology and neuroscience at USC, recruited 22 amateur and professional comedians, including six improvisers from the Groundlings — the Los Angeles theatre that launched the careers of Will Ferrell and Melissa McCarthy, among others — and asked them to come up with captions for New Yorker cartoons while having their brains scanned. (We've visualised one of those scans below.) "It's not easy to be funny while lying in an MRI machine," Amir says. "There was a lot of complaining."

The scans revealed two curious things. First, when professional comedians create a joke, there's more activity in the parts of the temporal lobe known for abstract thought; amateurs create humour primarily in their prefrontal cortex, which is all about rational decision-making. The data seem to indicate that the best jokes rely more on unfocused daydreaming than problem-solving.

The researchers also found that when we think up a funny idea, regions with a high density of opioid receptor — the proteins that control feelings of euphoria or reward — become more active. Once those receptors get triggered, they flood the brain with dopamine. It's the same rush that comes with indulgent eating or having sex — or doing drugs. Are comedy writers just junkies who prefer laughs to narcotics? "That's our theory," Amir says.

Andrew B. Newberg, director of research at the Marcus Institute of Integrative Health, conducted a similar study in 2016, inviting comedians from The Onion, Curb Your Enthusiasm and other comedy cornerstones to have their brains studied. He noticed smaller structures in their basal ganglia, the region involved in the release of dopamine, which could suggest that "comedians seek out comedy because they need more stimulation in order to feel happy."

So how do these findings sit with actual comedians? Scott Dikkers, a founding editor of The Onion and owner of especially small basal ganglia, has doubts. "Certainly the delivery of comedy in a live environment, where you're actually getting laughs, triggers that response," he says. "But the creating of it, when you're alone in your apartment, trying to produce jokes on a blank computer screen? That's miserable work, the polar opposite of sex or drugs."

Either way, let's be thankful that our favourite comedians are strung-out joke junkies and finding the perfect punch line is the only thing that gets the monkey off their back.

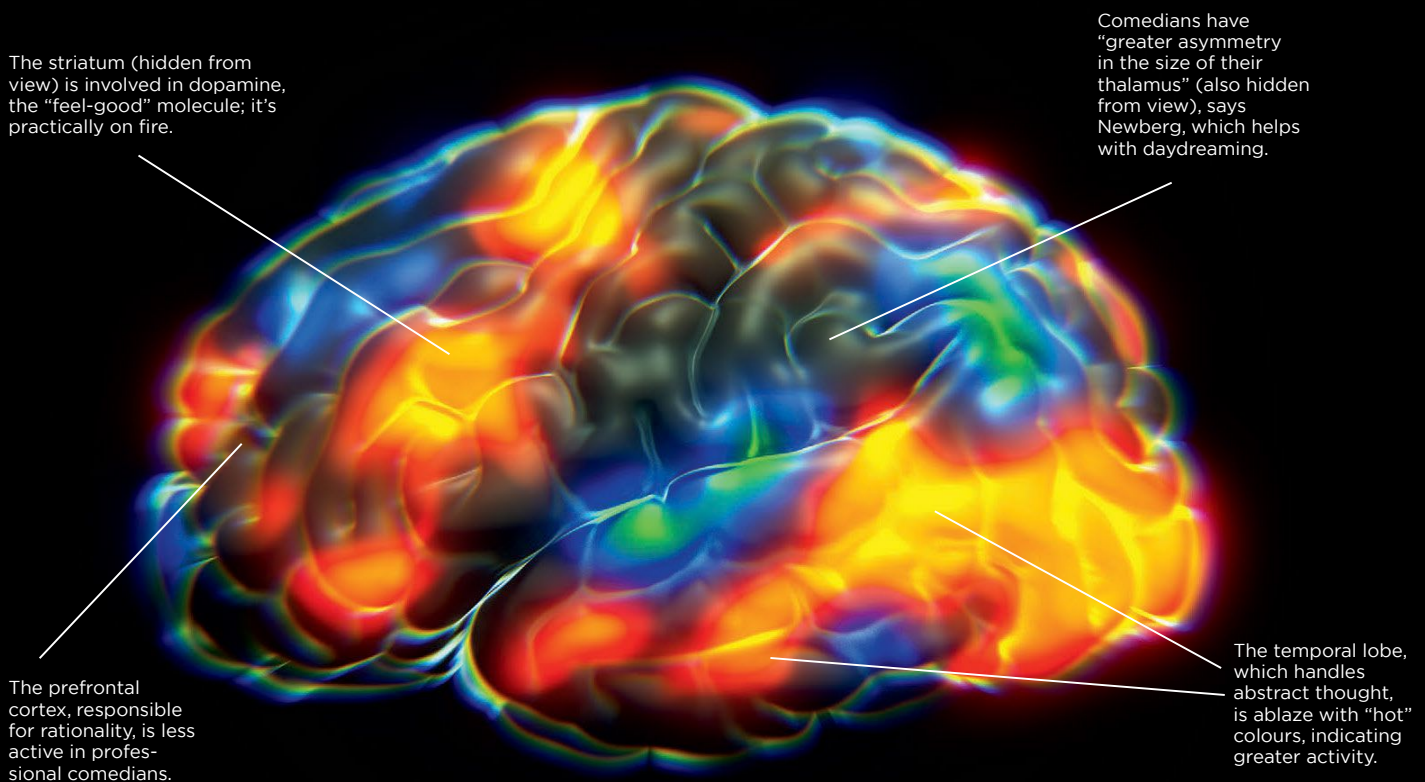


ILLUSTRATION BY **JUSTIN METZ**

Love in the Time of Comedy

A Conversation With Nicole Byer

Looking for love while bringing laughter to the masses is not easy; a co-median offers hard-won tips

Nicole Byer can be found judging earnest baking projects as a host of the new Netflix series Nailed It!, and she talks a whole lot about nailing other things on her podcast *Why Won't You Date Me?* But the one thing she hasn't nailed, as the title of the latter show implies, is the art of the long-term relationship. In her inimitable phrasing: "I've never been in a relationship where someone has farted on me and we're, like, cool about it." But LTRs be damned, Byer is a geyser of wisdom on the mysteries of love —wisdom that we men (including one very famous DJ) should heed.
— *Tim Donnelly*

PLAYBOY: On your podcast you interview guys you've hooked up with. What have you gleaned from those conversations about how we can be better at dating?

BYER: We don't want you to ghost us. You can tell me that you are not into me; you can say, "I had a great time, but I truly don't see this going anywhere. I'll never text you; I'll never call you. If you text or call me, I'm going to be nice about it and say, 'Maybe we should hang out on Thursday,' but guess what — Thursday doesn't fucking exist." You can be mean. You can literally tell me, "I fucked you once and I never want to fuck you again," and you're not going to hurt my feelings.

PLAYBOY: Is that true? A lot of guys think just saying nothing is gentler.

BYER: Absolutely! People like answers. That's why there are researchers, that's why there are scientists: You're trying to find answers for shit. That's why people go to the fucking moon — because we want to know what's up there.

PLAYBOY: You talk a lot in your comedy about using dating apps. What's the best strategy for picking photos of yourself to put online?

BYER: If you're fat, you gotta show off your fatness. If you're in a wheelchair, you gotta show off that you're in a wheelchair. Essentially, Tinder and all these apps are blind dates. You start texting and you think you know the person; you don't fucking know the person. You have to tell them everything about you. Fat ladies love to take the aboveangle selfies because then they have one chin. But when you meet the dude or the woman in person, they'll see your second and third chins. They should know about it before you go out. I have this one picture of me holding a two-foot dildo. I had it up as, like, a barometer: If you could have an opening conversation with me without mentioning that, maybe you're worth talking to.

PLAYBOY: Have you gone out with someone whose pictures were a complete lie?

BYER: I had one guy who looked like he was tall in his pictures but ended up being five-foottwo. He was, like, touching the ceiling in the picture, but after I met with him I went back and looked at his profile and was like, "Oh my God, he's in a basement room. The door frame is the same height as the fucking ceiling." He was also very boring. He was trash.

PLAYBOY: In this moment in history, lots of single guys want to come off right away as allies or woke or at least not a Louis C.K. creep. What can you tell them?

BYER: If you don't get it, then be a creep. Don't pretend to be something you're not. If you are woke and you think you understand women, then you don't need to showcase that; she'll know it when she's with you. Men have been fed such toxic shit for such a long time. Everybody's learning. Women are learning that what they thought was okay isn't really okay, and men are learning that what they thought was okay isn't okay. I don't think you need to present yourself as a savant of intersectional feminism. If a woman says, "Hey, buddy, that was pretty sexist," you go, "Oh shit, sorry about that. Can you explain why? Because I honestly don't know; otherwise I wouldn't have said it."

PLAYBOY: Has any date pulled a Nailed It! and tried to bake something impressive for you?

BYER: This one guy made me pancakes that were gross. He made this blueberry compote syrup. I was like, "You think you're better at this than you are." How do you screw up pancakes? I dated him on and off for three fucking years. I just never ate anything else he made.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever date your fans?

BYER: No. There's no such thing as chucklefuckers for women. I've never met a female comic who's like, "Yeah, after my shows dudes are lining up trying to fuck me." The compliments I get from men after shows are usually "I don't like women, but you're funny" or "You're funny for a girl." Men get so many chucklefuckers because all a man has to do is be slightly funny and have a dick.

PLAYBOY: Let's end on a slightly odd question, considering your romantic track record: What can all guys do to be better partners?

BYER: You need to be more responsive. If a girl is texting you 100 times a day, fucking text a bitch back. And eat her out. Eat out women! If you want your dick sucked, you have to. Not everyone's a DJ Khaled. DJ Khaled makes millions of dollars a year. That's why he gets to do whatever he wants. I'll go "Ha ha ha!" at your dumbest joke; a lot of women will do that. You're not funny. We're laughing because we're hoping you'll eat our pussy.

PLAYBOY'S PARTY JOKES

Streaming your homemade sex videos to an 82-inch 4K television is a great way to make your manhood look larger than life. It's also a great way to get thrown out of Best Buy.

August is named after the emperor Augustus because he logged many of his

greatest triumphs in that month. So it seems only fair that we change the name of the 10th month of the year from October to Reggie Jackson.

Virtual-reality porn: for when you really want to know what it feels like to be in a sparsely decorated split-level house in the San Fernando Valley.

A survey of male college students revealed that 20 percent of respondents had masturbated in a classroom or library. In a related survey, 100 percent of college janitors said they want a fucking raise.

Sex is like pizza: We simply cannot agree on whether a pineapple should be involved.

WEDDING SEASON

*Comedian, actor, author and former strip-club DJ **Jimmy O. Yang** is in the house to warm you up for the forthcoming Crazy Rich Asians movie with a few thoughts on bachelor parties:*

What do you call a bachelor party with no strippers? An intervention.

To all the newlyweds: If one of you slept around the night before your wedding, don't call it cheating; just think of it as the last meal.

We couldn't afford strippers for my bachelor party, so my friends and I covered ourselves in body glitter and cheap perfume just to make our ladies jealous.

The last thing I remember from my bachelor party is taking a shot of tequila So I'm having my honeymoon early. In Tijuana. Without my wife. In the trunk of a car.

Always invite your fiancée's brother to your bachelor party. Then make him smoke PCP like Denzel in Training Day so he can't implicate you in any crimes committed.

Bachelor parties are the price women pay for weddings. Weddings are the price men pay for bachelor parties.

My fiancée was crystal clear about my bachelor party: no getting screwed for money. So I said, "In that case, we're firing our wedding photographer and our caterers."

For my friend's bachelor party, we spent the weekend in Napa Valley wine tasting, antiquing and horseback riding through the vineyards. Everything was arranged by the best man, who has since been demoted to worst woman.

A groom slept with the stripper at his own bachelor party, resulting in a cancelled wedding and an awful Yelp review for the stripper.

Welcome to the Backhanded Compliment Club! It's great meeting so many people who don't care how they look.

There are two types of people in this world: good ones, and the ones who text you the words Call me.

Strip clubs in the hipster haven of Portland, Oregon offer vegan buffets. That would explain the patrons who have been seen ducking into the restrooms to beat their meat substitute.

A female doctor has to deliver some bad news to a patient.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Levin, but you'll never have intercourse again."

Stunned, the man asks, "What is it, doctor? My prostate? An STD? Tell me!"

The doctor shakes her head. "No, no. You see, I matched with you on Tinder, and any grown man who lists Pokémon as an interest will never get laid."

"Last night, Granny read your manuscript. She thinks it needs more sex."

MATTIE SPEARS

Photography by **BRUCE COLERO** *Text by* **NELLY MADUNA**

TRUE TEMPER

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Playboy has always been a huge dream of mine. I used to always talk about it even before I was the age of 18! Hugh Hefner built this legacy from the ground up, and I couldn't be more honored to be able to experience these amazing opportunities, I still feels as if I'm living in a dream!

Who inspires you?
Super model Elsa Hosk, everyday life and my mom who is always there for me and is my biggest fan.

What do you consider to be the perfect date?
A weekend getaway into the country for a picnic by the lake, and a vineyard to wine taste.

Girl crush
Taylor Hill

Favourite quote
"When you are truly genuine, there will invariably be people who do not accept you. And in that case, you must be your own badass self, without apology." ☒ Katie Goodman

Favourite food
A good rare steak

Favourite place
It would have to be right in my hometown on the Florida coast, in a bikini, with a fishing pole in my hand, and listening to George Strait on the radio!

Biggest fear
Not taking the risks I should've when I had the chance.

One destination I'd love to visit
Alaska to see the Northern lights and spend a weekend fishing.

I'm not embarrassed to say
What's on my mind, or be the weird bubbly country girl that I am.

Turn-ons
Someone tall, dark and handsome with a great personality.

Turn-offs
People who are full of themselves. I also don't like slacking, I believe in hard work! You have to hustle hard to achieve your dreams and your goals no matter what they are. So, every day I wake up and focus on my dreams and reach the goals I have set, whether they are long-term or short-term.

Biggest dream
My biggest dream is to become a Victoria's Secret model and walk the runway with some of the most beautiful woman in the world!

Future plans
My future plans are to strive to be a better woman in society every day and be the best form of me that I can be on the inside and the outside, so I can be an inspiration to aspiring younger models and give them the confidence to chase their dreams just as I did.

AMONG the ATHEISTS

A former minister immerses himself in the American Atheists convention, bearing witness to the non-believer movement as it rises from the ashes of 2016

BY **J.W. HOLLAND** ILLUSTRATION BY **EDEL RODRIGUEZ**

Touching down at Will Rogers airport in Oklahoma City, I request a ride; within minutes a young woman named Sandra pulls up to take me to my hotel. Contemporary Christian music plays quietly from her radio, a cross hangs from the rearview and a Bible peeks out from the door pocket at my feet. I recognise Sandra, though not personally. Sandra is me several years ago, back when I was on a mission to save a world doomed to hell by any means necessary. Planting seeds, we called it.

What she doesn't know, and what I don't bother to tell her, is that I was ordained as a minister in the Southern Baptist Convention. Sandra might have admired me back when I was attending dinner parties with Judge Roy Moore and riding on Herman Cain's bus. Now she probably wouldn't be a fan. About six years ago, after a long stretch of mounting self-hate and force-fed guilt, I became an atheist. Today, Sandra's passenger is in town to attend the 2018 American Atheists National Convention.

I was raised to believe that Madalyn Murray O'Hair, founder of American Atheists and subject of the recent Netflix docudrama *The Most Hated Woman in America,* was a drug-addled, devil-worshipping sex maniac. So I honestly have no idea what to expect at this convention except maybe drug-addled, sexcrazed devil-worshipping. Just a few years ago I might have been in the street, protesting such an event, and now I'm a registered attendee.

What a time to be alive.

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I'm here, in part, to see how the atheist movement, the vanguard of the roughly 27 percent of Americans who identify as nonreligious, has changed since the election of Donald Trump. Does the president's overwhelming support from evangelical Christian voters stand to threaten the rights of nonbelievers and religious liberty itself? White evangelicals, according to the Pew Research Center, gave Trump 81 percent of their vote, at least three percent more than they gave any of the previous three Republican presidential nominees.

With his track record of rough language and sexual bravado and apparent zeal for most of the deadly sins, Trump does not immediately come across as the man for dedicated Christians. (He called the Bible his favourite book in a 2015 interview and then declined to identify a single verse.) Barack Obama was a professing Christian long before he entered the White House, and yet evangelicals by and large despised him. George W. Bush, a man of deep faith who shares the evangelical vision of a Second Coming, garnered nearly the same base as Trump. If you disregard the possibility of this support having anything to do with sexism, racism, homophobia and xenophobia, it would take quite a bit of mental gymnastics to make sense of the current situation.

In a noisy banquet room being prepared for the American Atheists' awards dinner, I meet up with Alison Gill, the group's legal and policy director, and staff attorney Geoffrey Blackwell to get a better understanding of what they've seen in the past two years. Gill tells me that, on the bright side, "there has been a real resurging interest in the electoral process and government." Many activists, advocates and philanthropists want to be more involved than before; she cites a "new wave of people" who are interested in running for office.

Gill also admits, "At the federal level we've just seen a wave of negative changes that really impede the separation of government and religion, a far greater assault than we could have first suspected."

Blackwell says one of the most consequential issues he is seeing is "the appointment of very questionable judges to federal judgeships." The Obama administration struggled to fill these openings, but the current administration is working more efficiently to load them with "far-right religious conservatives who are really putting at risk a lot of the precedents that our current understanding of religious freedom

THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF NONTHEISTS MAKES THEM THE LARGEST VOTING GROUP IN THE COUNTRY.

From left: Black Nonbelievers president Mandisa Thomas; keynote speaker Hugh Laurie; comedian Victor Harris Jr.

depends on." Blackwell adds that Trump could end up appointing as many as 30 percent of those critical slots.

Gill points out that so far those confirmations include Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch and Seventh Circuit judge Amy Coney Barrett. Gorsuch authored the extremely conservative opinion Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc., and Barrett, according to Gill, "was an academic who sought to advance the role of religion in interpreting certain legal rules and bodies of law."

David Silverman, president of American Atheists until a legal and ethical scandal resulted in his ouster.

So it comes as a surprise when Gill and Blackwell mention that American Atheists finds agreement among some religious organisations. It turns out the Johnson Amendment — the 1954 tax code provision that prohibits all 501(c)(3) nonprofit organisations from endorsing or opposing political candidates — has detractors on both sides. More than 100 religious organisations from around the country signed a letter to Trump last August, asking him to protect the Johnson Amendment. "Churches all over the country don't want politics drawn into the sanctuary," Blackwell says. With their flocks shrinking, some religious leaders are apparently concerned with Trump's promises to repeal the amendment: "Why put churches in a position where they feel obligated to take a political position if they weren't already doing so?" Blackwell says. He adds that on several individual issues, including how nonprofits are treated by the IRS, churches and atheists stand together — "even if we disagree on the question of whether or not there is a deity."

Neda Bolourchi, a research associate at the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics at Columbia University, shares Blackwell's sentiments about finding common ground. Over e-mail she tells me that "there has been a confluence of support for the Johnson Amendment…. All of these have come together because they do not believe that religion is encumbered by this law, which has existed for over 50 years and been supported by both parties and all branches of government." Bolourchi believes the only groups that would oppose this law are those that see 501(c)(3) organisations as easy vessels to introduce nearly untraceable "dark money" into politics. With the 2010 Citizens United decision and the financial floodgates it opened to campaign contributions, you can see a problem here: Millions of churches in America could become individual political action committees funded by virtually anonymous donors. Not only is that a problem for fair elections; it could also lead to compromised control over local religious bodies.

While much of the convention was focused on fighting what its organisers view as the current threats to the separation of church and state, an almost equal amount of time was spent examining the steps atheists must take to claim an equal place in American society. The next day I meet with David Silverman, president of American Atheists, in the speakers' green room. Less than two weeks after the close of the convention, Silverman will be fired after a brief investigation into sexual and financial misconduct. In a statement on his Facebook page, he will write (and then delete), "I categorically deny any wrongdoing, legally or ethically." But here at the convention, Silverman is focused on a different upheaval.

"I think what we have seen over the past couple of years is a terrible depression on behalf of most of the American Atheists movement," he says. President Obama had an open-door policy with religious and nonreligious leaders alike, even favourably mentioning the latter in his second inaugural address: "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and nonbelievers." To date, Trump has refused to meet with the nontheistic community. "We went from a very high place to a very low place," Silverman says. "We weren't ready for that defeat." But this is a convention, not a wake, and Silverman makes a point that will echo many times throughout the weekend — a point that ironically reminds me of religious groups that faced scepticism at best and bigotry at worst before entering the American mainstream. "I think we have seen the bottom," he says. "This convention will be used to elevate the rest of the movement. If we come out and stop hiding behind euphemisms like agnostic or humanist, if we actually call ourselves atheists, we will be able to take our place at society's table almost immediately."

• • •

With more than 850 attendees and a celebrity keynote speaker—House star Hugh Laurie — American Atheists appears to be taking its

message on a more mainstream path than ever before. As I stand in the back of the ballroom, I can't help noticing the attentiveness of the crowd. The room is packed but hushed. I don't remember ever seeing a gathering this engaged for this length of time, even back in my days as a minister. The applause seems genuine, with the occasional standing ovation; none of it comes across as forced. From the start of the convention, there has been an electricity in the air. In every corner of the hotel, I see attendees in deep conversation about everything from politics to sexuality.

I find myself sharing personal information that many in my own family don't know, and I sense no judgment. It occurs to me that I have never been this at ease with any other group of people in my life. Multiple speakers extol the size of the country's atheist voting bloc: The estimated number of nontheists, even on the modest end, makes them the largest voting group in the country. A 2016 Pew poll identified 20 percent of voters as white Evangelicals, while 21 percent held no religion—a whopping seven percent increase since 2008. Add that to a recent University of Kentucky study that shows as many as 26 percent of the population may be atheists, and you begin to see the potential influence of an organised nonreligious community. As Silverman suggested in our conversation, the issue among this group is not size but visibility.

To harness our considerable potential, atheists must be more outspoken about our beliefs, or lack thereof. Perhaps that emergence is already under way. Atheists are finding modest success in areas previously unthinkable: In Tennessee, Gayle Jordan, the executive director of Recovering From Religion, an organisation that helps people deal with the repercussions of leaving their faith, ran for state senate, gaining around 30 percent of the vote in a deep red and highly religious district. Jordan tells me during the convention that her democratic supporters "were mostly religious people, and I ran as an out and open atheist." Shockingly, she was also able to garner the support of many among the state's Tea Party. Faced with the choice between "an unethical Christian Republican or an ethical Democratic atheist," Jordan tells me it was remarkable to see the voters of her district support her. Remarkable indeed, considering the results of the 2016 presidential elections. But when you consider the right's almost three decades of attacks on Hillary Clinton's character, it becomes clearer how evangelical voters were able to justify voting for Trump.

The most encouraging moment of the weekend comes when I introduce myself to Mandisa Thomas, president and founder of Black Nonbelievers, an organisation dedicated to support and visibility for black atheists. Thomas, who was raised nonreligious, tells me that black nonbelievers often think they're the only ones in what are traditionally heavily religious areas: "To say that you're an atheist in the black community is almost like you're trying to reject your race." The reality, she says, is that with wildly disproportionate levels of violence, poverty and disease afflicting so many black communities, thoughts and prayers aren't going to cut it. "You have to say enough is enough," she tells me. "At what point is praying or going to church going to resolve that? At what point are you going to start thinking for yourself and putting more evidence-based measures into place?"

• • •

That, in a nutshell, is what I take away from the convention: If you want things to change, you have to change them. Of course many religious organisations do great things for society, but those things often come with strings attached. Nonbelievers have the power to do good without the promise or threat of an omnipotent being. I would like to say atheists have cornered the market on character, but Silverman's messy departure from the organisation just days after the convention serves as a reminder: No group is free of human error or frailty. Still, the work goes on. At the end of the convention — Easter Sunday, as it happens — organisers and volunteers purchase, pack and donate 30,000 meals for needy families in the area. Hundreds of atheists, including Dr. House, work shoulder to shoulder in a hotel ballroom. I leave for my ride back to the airport more encouraged than I've felt in years — not just in atheists but in humankind as a whole.

One ideology doesn't control the narrative for acts of kindness; it's the responsibility of us all. After that weekend in Oklahoma City, I feel empowered to parrot the sentiment of Hugh Laurie, who told a packed ballroom, "I stand before you a proud atheist." If I ever see Sandra again, I'm going to tell her.

SHOWDOWN on the HUDSON

FICTION

BY WALTER MOSLEY

A cowboy in Harlem learns his code of conduct may not survive outside Texas — and neither may he

ILLUSTRATION BY **MARC ASPINALL**

How the whole thing started is a mystery to most people, even the police. But those of us who were around 145th Street and Broadway, up in Harlem, knew something new was happening the day Billy Consigas came to town. His mother had moved to New York from southern Texas to escape an abusive husband: "A roustabout name of Henry Ryder," Billy told us.

And so Billy (who was 15 at the time) was forced to leave his beloved Texas for Harlem. He didn't like New York at first, said that there was no place to stretch your legs or keep a horse. Some of us used to tease him but that never amounted to much because Billy was an honest-to-God, 100 percent bona fide black Texas cowboy. He wore a felt Stetson hat that was almost pure white. From the band of his hat hung a tassel of multicoloured triple-stringed beads that he said was a gift from his Choctaw girlfriend when he had to leave Texas to come north. He wore fancy bright shirts with snap buttons made from garnet, topaz and quartz. His jeans were always well-worn and rough as sandpaper. And he boasted that he had cowboy boots for every occasion — from weddings to funerals.

He got in good with the girls because, before long, he had a job with the NYPD, training their horses in a special area of Central Park. He'd take young ladies up there in the early hours of the morning and teach them how to ride. Nesta Brown told me that if a man takes a girl riding in the morning he will most likely be riding her that night.

She said "most likely" with a dreamy look in her eyes and a kiss on her lips.

Girls our age flocked around Billy and I never heard one of them call him a dog.

The black cowboy also had the most beautiful pistol any of us had ever seen. It was a silvery Colt Cowboy .44 six-shooter etched with all kinds of designs and finished with a polished horn handle. The holster for his 10-inch pistol was black with silver studs. And even though I am no fan of cowboy films, when I saw how fast Billy could draw I downloaded 14 cowboy films.

Billy drawled when he spoke and respected everyone he met. He'd always take his hat off inside or when in the presence of a woman or girl. And he could fight like a motherfucker.

One time, over by the Hudson, uptown, this big dude was chasing down some man that he claimed owed him money. The big man caught the little one and started beating him. The poor guy fell to the pavement and was bleeding from his mouth and forehead. That's when the big man started kicking him.

After two or three kicks Billy Consigas walked up and said, "All right now, he's had enough."

When I tell you that the bully was big I mean it in every way possible: He was tall and fat and had biceps almost the size of his head. He was fast too. He hit Billy — who was five-10 and 160 at most — right in the chest. Billy flew back and hit the wall behind him. We all thought he was going to get himself killed.

The little man on the ground got up and started running.

Billy pushed off from the wall, took a deep breath, and then he smiled. Smiled!

"Fuck you, you grinnin' fool," the big man yelled, and then he ran right at Billy.

Billy kept on smiling. He didn't move until the guy was almost on him…and then he did an amazing thing. He jumped half a step to the right so that his attacker slammed into the wall. Then Billy jumped up on top of the guy and clamped his left arm around his neck. We didn't know it at the time but that was the end of the fight right there. The big guy was twisting and jumping around but couldn't throw Billy off, and Billy was steady, hitting him in the face with these wicked uppercuts. He must have hit him two dozen times before the behemoth slumped down on the sidewalk. The bully tried to get up three times but his legs were spaghetti and his shoes roller skates. We never found out what happened to him because we heard sirens and scattered.

• • •

After that fight Billy became like a hero among the young men and women up around 145th.

He didn't consider himself a leader because of something he called the Cowboy Code. I never got all the ins and outs of that system but it had something to do with being self-sufficient and treating all others equally. Leaders, he thought, were only for the weak.

"Felix," he said to me late one afternoon when I was showing him around Times Square, "a man has to stand up on his own two feet. The only leaders they should evah have is parents, teachers and generals during time of war. Other than that we all just people come from our mothers and headed for the grave."

Billy talked like that. He bought me a hot dog and I paid for our tickets to the wax museum. We walked in the crowds for hours. He was especially intrigued by the Singing Cowboy, who wore only a Stetson hat and underpants as he played the guitar and posed for photographs.

"What do you think about that?" I asked after Billy stared at the street performer for at least three minutes.

"Like any other child's cartoon on the television."

• • •

It was somewhere past 11 in the evening when we decided to take the number 1 train back to Harlem. Billy had paid for our barbecue dinner. He told me that it was okay because the police gave him good money to train their horses.

When we were walking toward the train someone said, "I'll be damned, a nigger in a cowboy hat. I never seen anything like that before."

I turned first and saw a group of five young white men and three young women. They were maybe a year or two older than us. The guys sported new-looking blue jeans and fancy shirts like the ones Billy wore. The girls had on modern party dresses, slight and short. I was nervous because it was only the two of us against five of them, not counting the girls.

I say "against" because the leader, a tall and skinny guy with a long and somehow misshapen face, had used the word nigger, and that word — in that tone of voice and that situation— meant conflict.

Billy turned and smiled. I had come to associate that expression with sudden violence. This mental connection only added to my fear.

"A peckawood with a problem," Billy said jovially.

"That's more common than rattlesnakes down a prairie hole."

"You sound like Texas," the speaker of the group speculated.

"And you sound like horseshit."

"Where you come from, boy?" the white youth asked.

"From a long line'a men."

In any other situation I would have run but I didn't want Billy to think less of me. So I squared my shoulders and wondered which one of the five I could get at before his friends got to me.

That was what Billy did: He made people happy and proud, brave and courageous — qualities that rarely served a poor black man or boy well.

"You think you man enough to take us?" the leader asked.

"At five to two?" Billy asked. "All we got to do is stand our ground and we prove better than some gang'a roughnecks."

The leader smiled, a grin that was a close relative of Billy's violent mirth.

I realised that I was holding my breath.

"My name is Nacogdoches," the white youth claimed. "Nacogdoches Early."

"Billy."

"You a cowboy, Billy?"

"I've been in a rodeo or two."

I thought of Billy taking down that giant on the Hudson. He wasn't afraid because he'd brought down steers with that same hold.

"You got a gun?" Nacogdoches inquired.

Billy shrugged.

"You a gunslinger?" Nacogdoches said to Billy.

"Faster'n you."

The warped-faced white youth's eyebrows raised and his smile broadened.

"Is one of these fine ladies your girl?" Billy asked.

A strawberry blonde moved her shoulders in such a way to indicate that she was the one.

"No bullets," Billy said as if they had already agreed on the gunfight. "Just a video camera feed. If you win I'll spit polish your green boots
right on that corner in just my long johns and hat at high noon on a Saturday. If you lose, that pretty girl will agree to have dinner with me at the place and time of my choosin'."

The girl tried to frown but instead a smile grazed her lips. She wasn't really that pretty, I thought, but had the kind of face that you'd want to nod to at a party or if you sat near her on a subway train.

Nacogdoches was biting his lower lip.

"Okay," he said at last. "When and where?"

"There's a youth centre down on 63rd," I said.

"Lazarus House. We do it there in three days at 10 at night."

In spite of the offer my plan was simply to get away.

The principals agreed and I gave Nacogdoches the address.

• • •

"What kinda crazy luck you have to have that you run into another cowboy with a six-shooter somewhere in the middle of a million people?" I asked Billy on the number 1 train.

"It's the bright lights," the black cowboy opined.

"What?"

"You know a cowboy loves the stars more than anything. He's drawn to the lights like a moth to fire. Times Square is bright like the heavens come down to the ground. And you know two cowboys will see each other. No, no, Felix. It would be a wonder if we didn't meet up sooner or later."

"We don't have to do this thing, Bill," I said.

"We just don't show up and it'll all blow over."

"Maybe so," he said, "but we will be there."

• • •

All the youngsters in our neighbourhood knew about the showdown, as Billy called it, scheduled for Wednesday night. They gossiped about it and bragged on their black cowboy hero.

In the interim I saw Billy every day because I was his assigned tutor.

"Hello, Felix," Mrs. Consigas greeted me on that Wednesday afternoon. She was a darkskinned black woman with a young face. "You're a little early, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What's that you're carryin'?"

"My uncle's video camera."

"What for?"

"My sister's in a dance recital after and I'm going to video it for my mother. She works nights." It was all lies, but Marion Consigas didn't know my mother or my sister.

"You're a good boy, Felix Grimes." I spent the next two hours trying to teach Billy about variables in algebra. I was a good student, and, as far as school went, Billy was dumb as a post; he said so himself.

"It takes me a long time to get the idea," he said to me at our first tutoring session, "but once I got it, it's there forever."

He didn't talk about the showdown at all. I told some friends where it was happening, including Sheila Grant, a girl I wanted but who had eyes only for the Harlem Cowboy — Billy Consigas.

Billy struggled through the workbook lesson and somewhere around eight he said, "Time to go."

• • •

We all — Billy, Sheila and five guys — arrived early. My brother Terrence, who worked at Lazarus House as a nighttime security guard, was waiting at the side entrance. He told us that Nacogdoches was already inside with his posse.

My brother was 19, three years older than I. He was nervous but Billy ponied up $20 for the use of the gym, and Terrence was always looking for more money.

Nacogdoches was there with the same seven friends. This detail said something

about the ugly Southerner that I couldn't quite put my finger on.

While I set up the tripod and video cam, Billy and Nacogdoches decided on the rules.

"Best out of three," the white cowboy said.

"And we check to make sure that each other's gun is empty before each duel," added Billy.

"Duel?" Nacogdoches sneered. "What are you, some kinda English faggot?"

"I am what I am," Billy said, "and that's more than enough for you."

Nacogdoches frowned and balled his fists. Billy wasn't school trained but he once told me that all true cowboys could sing and were poets.

The white gunslinger couldn't match him with words and so he said, "Thalia will count. On three we draw."

Billy nodded, no longer smiling.

• • •

The duelists checked each other's gun and then took their places six steps apart. The white guy had a mean look on his face. Billy was as peaceful as moonlight on the Hudson.

Billy smiled and shook his head. He tied the lace again and I turned on the camera.

"One," Thalia said, and a sense of doom descended upon me.

"Two," she pronounced. It struck me that this last contest meant far more than two young men proving themselves.

"Three."

Nacogdoches was faster this time. He grabbed his piece and had it out like a real gunslinger in a fight for his life.

But Billy was faster still. On the video replay he had the silver gun out and had played like he was fanning the hammer with his left hand before Nacogdoches had his barrel level.

"We could have hot dogs on that corner where I said I'd shine your boyfriend's shoes," Billy suggested to Thalia.

"No you won't," Nacogdoches said.

"That was the bet," Billy countered, the asskicking smile back on his lips.

"You didn't pull the trigger," his rival argued.

"Why I wanna pull on a trigger when I know the gun is empty?"

asked me to come with him as Sheila and the rest walked to the subway. He said he wanted to talk about something as we strolled north on Broadway.

But before he had the chance someone said,

"Stop right there."

I was already nervous. Most of my life I had spent at my home, at church or in school, where I had been an honor student every year, every semester. I wasn't used to running the street with armed friends and watching duels.

Two uniformed policemen were getting out of their black-and-white cruiser. Billy had his six-shooter in a battered brown leather satchel and the police had the right of stop-and-frisk.

Once again I had the urge to run but I knew that wouldn't end well.

One cop was white and the other black.

"What are you doing here so late at night, boys?" the black cop asked.

"Good evening, Officer O'Brien," Billy said to the white policeman.

"Consigas?" he replied.

He had the silver gun out before Nacogdoches had his barrel level.

He wasn't handsome, but Billy had a look that made you feel like there was something good somewhere, something you could depend on.

Thalia, that was Nacogdoches's girl, counted out loud. When she got to three Nacogdoches slapped his brown leather holster, coming up with his black iron gun at incredible speed. But when we looked at the replay it was obvious, even to Nacogdoches's friends, that easygoing Billy had his piece out first. The black cowboy's movements were fluid, seamless.

Nacogdoches was slower on the second draw. We didn't even have to look at the replay.

After that Billy started undoing the leather string that laced the bottom of the black and silver holster to his right thigh.

"What you doin'?" Nacogdoches asked.

"Two outta three," Billy said.

"I want the last draw."

"Why?"

"You scared?" Nacogdoches asked in a taunting tone.

"You could draw faster if you didn't move your finger. Any fool could pull a gun out by its butt."

Billy squinted as if he was on his beloved prairie trying to make out a shadow on the horizon. He shook his head ever so slightly and then shrugged, moving his shoulders no more than an inch.

"Thank you, Terrence," Billy said waving to my brother, who was standing next to the exit door. "We finished here."

"You didn't pull the trigger," Nacogdoches

said again.

"I won," Billy replied.

Terrence herded us out the door and onto 63rd.

Thalia, who was wearing black jeans and a calico blouse, walked up to Billy and shook his hand. He gave her a quizzical stare but she lowered her head and turned away.

"I won!" Nacogdoches said as he and his friends walked toward Central Park.

• • •

We were headed to the train when Billy

"You get that parade trot down yet?"

"This is the kid I was telling you about,

Frank," the white cop said to his partner. "He can do anything on a horse. A real-life cowboy from Texas."

"I was just playin' basketball with my friend Felix here down at Lazarus House," Billy said.

O'Brien asked Billy a few things about riding and then shook my friend's hand, shook his hand.

"I thought the Cowboy Code said you shouldn't lie," I said when we were installed on the train.

"She gave me her phone number," Billy replied.

"What?"

"That Thalia gave me her phone number on a little piece of paper when she shook my hand."

"Damn."

"What do you think I should do?"

I was, as I said, a good student and the kind of citizen that stays out of trouble. I preferred books to TV and ideas as opposed

to action, sweat or violence. I was always considered by my parents, teachers and, later on, by my employers, a good person. My only serious fault, as my father often told me, was that I often spoke without considering what it was that I said. This was most often a minor flaw, but in certain cases it could be a fatal one.

"You should call her and have lunch at that barbecue place with me and Sheila Grant," I advised.

"That way it'll be friendly."

Billy called Thalia the next day. He told her what I had said (and later regretted), and she agreed to the date.

"She said," Billy told me, "that Nacogdoches had obviously lost and she felt that it was her obligation to go on a date with the winning cowboy." The lunch was set for Saturday.

"What you mean he's goin' out with that white girl?" Sheila said when I asked her to come along.

"It's the bet," I explained lamely. "He kind of has to go."

"I bet he wouldn't think so if she was black."

"You know better than that, girl. Billy's doing it because he won and she knows it."

"Sounds stupid to me."

"That mean you're not comin'?"

• • •

We ordered hot links, brisket, fried chicken and pork ribs with corn bread, collard greens, fried pickles and a whole platter full of french fries.

"So where all you Southerners come from?" Sheila asked Thalia after we'd ordered.

"Only Nacky and one of the others, Braughm, are from the South. They're both out of Nashville. We all go to this private school called Reese on Staten Island. Most of the kids there are rich and have what they call social-behavior problems."

"But all his friends dress like cowboys," I said.

"They just wanna be like him," Thalia said with a twist to her lips. I remember thinking that if she was Caribbean she would have sucked a tooth.

"So you're rich?" Sheila asked Thalia as if it was some kind of indictment.

"No. My mother teaches there and she didn't like the kind of friends I had in public school. I like your hair. I wish I could do something like that with mine."

Sheila had thick corded braids that flowed down her back. She was a beautiful girl. She lost her angry attitude when Thalia complimented her.

"So Nacogdoches is like some kind of juvenile delinquent?" Billy asked.

"He got in trouble down South stealing. I think his parents just wanted to get rid of him. Anyway he's graduating this June. Says he's going out to California."

That's when the food came. We spent the rest of the lunch talking and joking. Thalia was a painter who wanted to specialize in horses. That's what drew her to Nacogdoches. He kept a horse at a stable in Connecticut and promised to bring her up there someday.

"But now I think he was just sayin' that to get in good with me," the white girl added.

Billy said he'd take her to the police stables the next morning. He invited me and Sheila too.

"It's not a date unless you two kiss," Sheila said when we were out in front of the Iron Spur Barbecue House.

Two uniformed policemen were getting out of their cruiser. I had the urge to run.

Thalia kissed Billy on the cheek and Sheila snapped the picture with her cell phone camera. Billy left with Thalia and Sheila gave me a few friendly kisses before I walked her home.

• • •

The next morning Thalia and Billy met us at the gate of the police stables — they were both wearing the same clothes from the day before.

I had problems keeping up with my horse. I was just bouncing, bouncing — up and down, to the side and almost to the ground once or twice — but we had a good time. The girls became friends and Billy was glad that we were there together.

"You know, Felix," he said to me when we were returning the big animals to their stalls,

"I realized yesterday that there are good people everywhere — not only in the place you come from."

Like every other citizen of the world with a cell phone, Sheila was an amateur photographer. She took pictures of us on our horses, out in the park and of me, Billy and Thalia walking side by side. Thalia's arm was linked with Billy's.

• • •

Things returned to normal after that, more or less. I continued in my post as secretary of the student council and helped Billy write a paper for his remedial English class, an essay about a book of cowboy poetry his grandfather had given him. Sheila and Thalia became Facebook friends. They shared pictures and started telling each other about their experiences in different boroughs and at different schools.

Over the next two weeks I asked Sheila to go out with me six times, but she always had some reason to say no.

Then one afternoon Sheila was waiting outside my German class, clutching her beloved smartphone.

"Hey, Sheil," I said trying to sound nonchalant.

"Look at this," she said, thrusting the phone into my hand.

On the screen was a photograph of Thalia. She had a black eye and bloody lip, and she seemed to be in the middle of a scream or a cry.

"Flip it," Sheila said.

There were seven pictures. It became obvious after the second shot that Thalia was being beaten while someone took pictures. In two shots someone was pulling her hair and slapping her. In another photo she was hunched over clutching her stomach with both hands as if someone had kicked her.

"Who sent you these?" I asked Sheila.

"It came from her phone. There was a text too."

The text read, *This is what happens to whores and race traitors.*

• • •

As his tutor I went to Billy's house almost every afternoon. That day we were putting the finishing touches on his poetry paper. Billy wrote on an old Royal typewriter.

"I don't really care for computers," he said. But I think he was just afraid of them.

The night before, he'd finished the fifth rewrite of the essay. He really did have deep insights into poetry written by people who turned their lives into verse. We did a word-by-word examination of his spelling and

grammar before I dared to broach the thing that was foremost in my mind.

"I need to show you something, Billy."

"What's that, Felix? You don't think that the paper's good enough?"

I located the forwarded files from Sheila's phone and showed him the pictures. Billy swiped through them saying not a word. His eyes seemed to get smaller but he wasn't squinting. If he drew a breath I couldn't tell.

After some minutes and close perusal of the photos, Billy said, "Can you send this motherfucker a note?"

Playground above 150 on the Hudson. Midnight tonight. Come ready. Come heavy.

Billy strapped on the pistol in his bedroom. It was exactly as he had done at Lazarus House but this time he tied the holster to his left leg.

"I thought you were right-handed," I said.

"Two-handed," Billy said, showing the first smile since he had seen the photos. "But I'm a little better with my left."

At 11:35 he donned an off-white trench coat and we left the house.

"Where you goin'?" Billy's mother said from the kitchen table, where she was drinking tea and watching TV.

"Over to Felix's," said my friend. "He's gonna help me type my paper into his computer so then I can send the file to Miss Andrews."

Outside we hailed a green cab and had her take us to the park.

Nacogdoches Early and his posse were waiting for us. Thalia was with them but as soon as we appeared she ran to us. Her face was swollen from the punishment she'd received.

"That's right," Nacogdoches said. "Go on over to them. That's where you belong."

A few moments later Sheila, Tom Tellerman and Teriq Strickland walked into the empty children's playground. I had called Sheila and she notified our other friends.

Nacogdoches was wearing a bright-coloured Mexican poncho that he flung off. Underneath he was wearing his brown holster and black gun. He was hatless and his pale skin shone in the shadowy light.

Billy took off his trench coat and draped itaround Thalia's shoulders. Sheila was holding the scared white girl by then.

There was no need for words. Billy and Nacogdoches squared off with about 10 paces between them.

"Thalia?" Billy called.

"Yeah?" she said.

"You strong enough to count to three, honey?"

Thalia walked to the river side of the two cowboys. The rest of us, white and black, moved out of the line of fire.

"One," Thalia said and I was reminded of the sense of fate I'd experienced at Lazarus House.

"Two," she announced, and I wanted to scream.

Before she was able to say the last number Nacogdoches reached for his pistol. He pulled out the gun and fired. But before that, with snake-like fluidity, Billy drew and shot. Nacogdoches's bullet went wild, landing, I believe, somewhere out on the Hudson. The young white man was dead before he hit the concrete. I remember that he fell on a chalk-drawn hopscotch design.

There was another shot and I looked to see Braughm, the other Southerner, aiming a pistol at Billy — who was now down on one knee. Billy shot once, hitting his assailant in the upper thigh. Two others of Nacogdoches's posse had guns, but Billy shot both of them before they could fire — one in the shins and the other in the shoulder.

After that we all ran.

• • •

At a coffee shop on 125th Street Billy was again wearing his trench coat and drinking from a bowl of chicken noodle soup. Sheila and Thalia were with us.

"You think he's dead?" Billy asked me.

"You hit him in the head."

Billy nodded and grimaced.

"It ain't no fun when somebody dies," he said.

After a few minutes of silence I noticed a red spot at the right shoulder of his off-white coat.

"You're bleeding."

"I think I need to get out of town," he said.

"I'll go with you," Thalia offered.

"That'd be nice," Billy said kindly, "but with all them bruises we'd be stopped before the train made it out of Penn Station."

Sheila's aunt and uncle were out of town, so we cleaned and dressed Billy's wound at their place. The bullet had come in through the front and gone out the back of Billy's shoulder.

"Lucky that Braughm had steel-jacketed slugs," Billy said. "A soft bullet woulda tore me up."

I went with my friend to Penn Station and waited with him for a train headed to Atlanta. I was worried that there might be some internal bleeding but Billy said he felt good and strong.

"I never wanted to live up here anyway," he said.

"What do you want me to tell your mom?"

"I'll write her, don't you worry about that. If she calls, tell her I left your place just before midnight and you don't know where I went." He boarded the 5:11 a.m. train and that was the last I saw of him. But his effects lingered for some time.

The police found Nacogdoches Early and followed the bloody trail back to his friends. All they knew was that there was some black kid named Billy who killed Nacogdoches in a gunfight. The cops got to my brother but he was no help, saying truthfully that he'd made the Lazarus deal with some kid named Billy but never knew where he'd come from.

Thalia told them about the beating but she'd tossed her phone and the cops never followed the electronic trail.

The three major newspapers loved the romance of a shoot-out on the Hudson. In the weeks that followed there were 17 Westernstyle gunfights across the city —black, white and brown would-be gunslingers dueling. No one was killed, but the mayor and the chief of police ratcheted up the stop-and-frisk program until even rich people started to complain. It all died down within six months' time. Billy's mother left Harlem, and I graduated a year early.

• • •

I was in my fourth year at Harvard, majoring in English literature with an emphasis on Yeats, when I received an unopened letter forwarded to me by my sister.

Dear Felix,

Over the years I have meant to write to you but was always on the move, and whenever I started the words didn't add up to much. I am very sorry for what I did when you knew me back then. There was no excuse for what Nacogdoches Early did to Thalia, but that didn't give me the right to take his life. Maybe if it had been a fair fight, maybe if I didn't know I could beat him, it would have been all right. But I knew I was the better gunman and so what I did was murder. I have spent my time since then in the country, from Montana to Northern California, riding horses and taking work as I find it. I see my mother from time to time. She moved back to Texas after Henry Ryder died and she didn't have to be afraid of him anymore. You were a good friend, Felix, and I appreciate you sticking by me even though you could have got in trouble too.

Maybe you should burn this letter after you read it. Whatever you do I'll be writing again. Maybe one day we'll even see each other in Times Square, or maybe on the Hudson.

Your friend, Billy

• • •

I haven't burned Billy's confession—not yet. I keep meaning to.

In the years since I have received 11 more letters from the Harlem Cowboy. In the last few he's written some very nice poetry about nature and manhood. His words mean a lot to me. His convictions about right and wrong give me the strength to not see myself as a victim. I got my Ph.D. from Harvard and now teach American literature at the University of Texas. In Billy's most recent letter he said that a girlfriend googled me and found out that I now lived in the Lone Star state.

"Don't be too surprised if I drop by your classroom one day, professor," he wrote. "In a long life you only get a few friends, and that's all she wrote."

PRESSLY ANN

Photography by **TRUC TROUNG** *Retouched by* **JESTON BRANDON**
Text by **NELLY MADUNA**

Tell us something surprising about you?
I have a college education and a fulltime career working with special needs children.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
I was very excited to shoot for Playboy. I've had multiple publications with them and get excited for every shoot.

What inspires you?
Money

What are some of your hobbies?
Dancing, working out, paddle boarding, and shopping (if that can be counted as a hobby).

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
My Little Girl by Tim McGraw.
What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
Bella, it means beautiful in Italian.

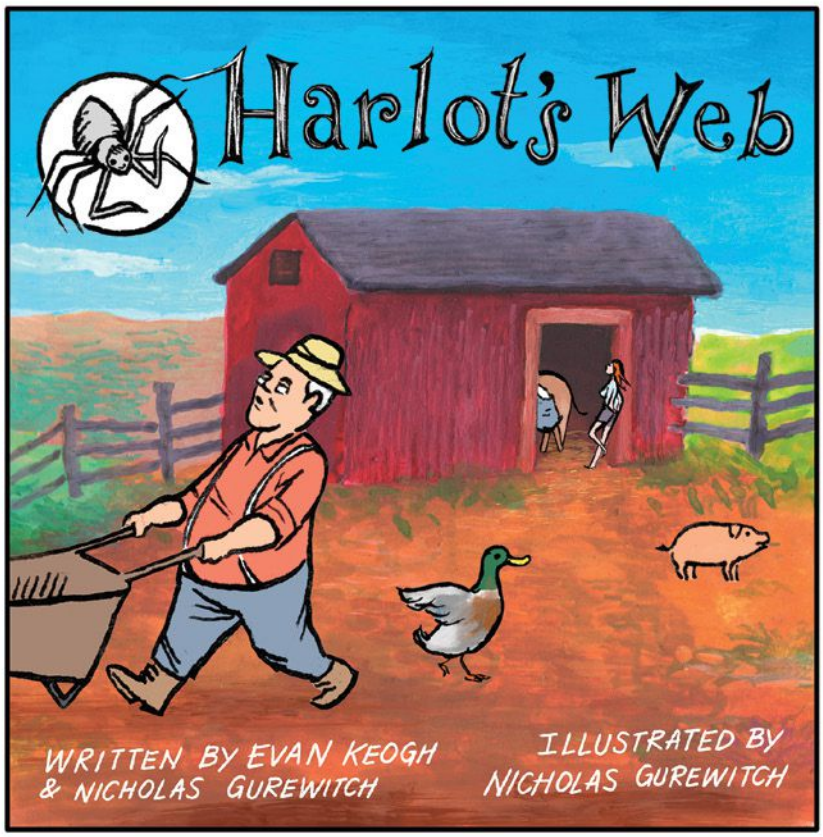
Turn-ons
A man who is established, educated, humble, and takes care of his appearance.

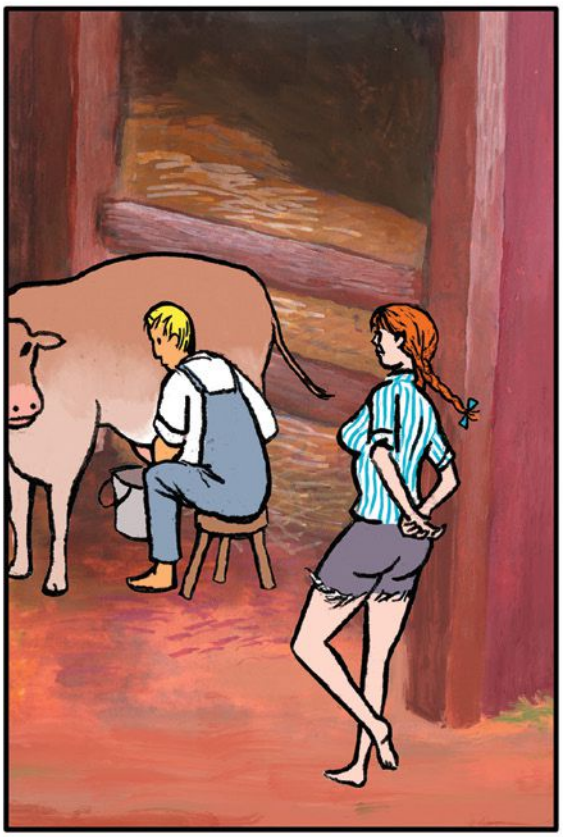
Turn-offs
Cockiness, laziness, and being messy.

Describe to us your perfect date
This sounds cliché, but I would enjoy an expensive romantic candlelit dinner followed by a walk along the beach.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why?
Rome. I am fascinated by the globally influential art and architecture it has to offer. It would be a dream come true to set foot inside the Vatican or Sistine Chapel.

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
Thank you for being a reader, follower, or fan. I appreciate you all more than you could ever imagine.


Harlot's Web
WRITTEN BY EVAN KEOGH & NICHOLAS GUREWITCH
ILLUSTRATED BY NICHOLAS GUREWITCH

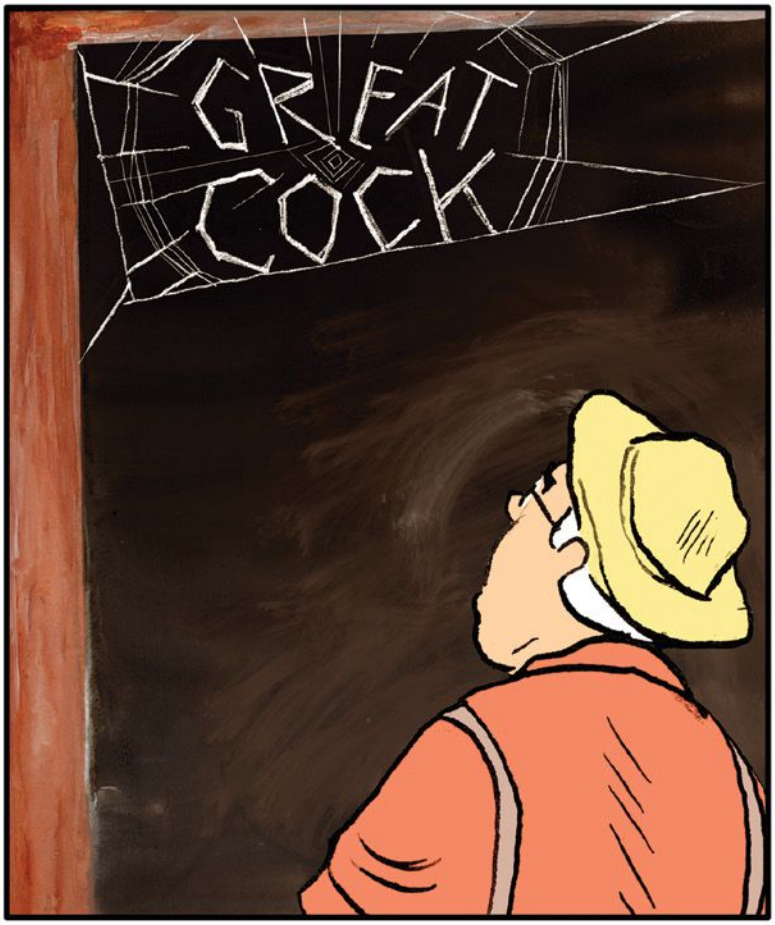


BABY, YOU GOT ONE FINE ASS.

ONE
FINE
ASS

ONE
FINE
ASS

THIS IS ONE


GREAT COCK

COCK

SWEET
PUSSY

GOOD LAY
WILD RIDE
HORNY STUD

CHRIST BABY
OH GOD
PUT IT IN

Classic cartoons

Summertime and the living is easy. Take a dip into our archive's comic offerings

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Fuckin' A——"

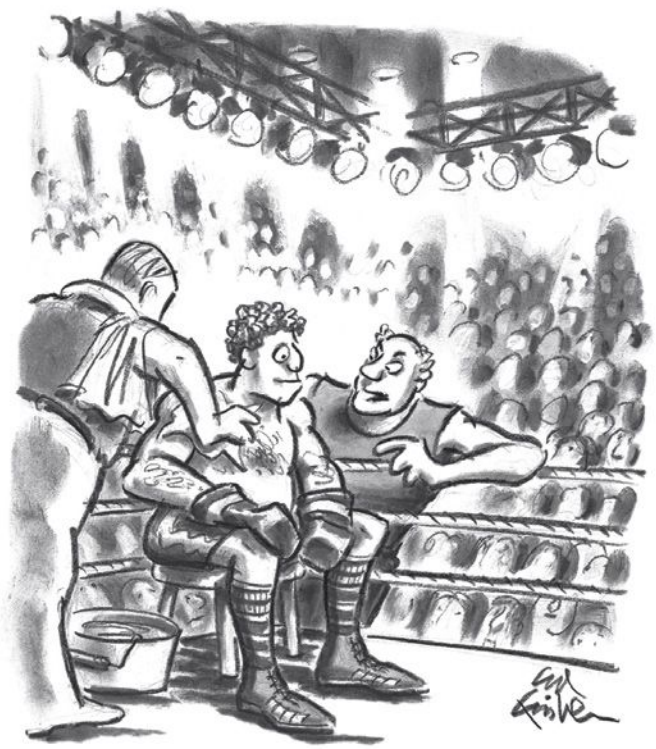
"There's a guy out here claiming we discriminate against men on the Party Jokes page."

"Protection? But, Mom—I'm wearing sunblock, sunglasses and a big hat! What more do you want?"

"Dear Diary: Another day in paradise. Took a walk on the beach, basked in the sunlit canopy of a tropical rain forest, crapped on a couple from Forest Hills."

"About time!"

" 'How I Spent My Summer Vacation'—or 'The Sexual Awakening of Stanley Quigley.' "



"Taunt him! Give him some shit! Impugn his personhood!"

"Taunt him! Give him some shit! Impugn his personhood!"

LIZZIE LEE

Photography by **PY PAI** *Text by* **NELLY MADUNA**
Make-up **@GISELLECOSMETICS**

Describe yourself in one sentence
I am a fun-loving, Californian native with a knack for cooking from scratch, a passion for being in front of the camera, and a love of the great outdoors.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Of course! It's been a dream and goal of mine throughout my entire modelling career so I couldn't have been any more excited!

Tell us something surprising about you
I am fluent in French & my mother was born in France.

What's your favourite colour?
Pink.

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
Songs don't really make me cry, or maybe it's that I don't listen to sad music.

What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
In French, "amour" means love, and I think it's a beautiful word, especially when pronounced properly, with a true French accent.

What are some of your hobbies?
I love cooking, riding my bike, and hiking/ enjoying the outdoors.

Turn-ons
I love manly men with beards.

Turn-offs
Cocky attitudes and guys trying to be someone they're not.

Describe to us your perfect date
What wins me over date-wise is being picked up, the door opened for me, and a classic romantic steak dinner with good conversation.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why?
I would love to go to Sydney, Australia, because I have never been and heard it is beautiful.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
There is a lot of competition and competitive models aren't always friendly. So it's been challenging finding a balance between staying humble and ignoring the drama.

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
I am @lizzieleemodel across all social media platforms. Follow me for more sexy photos and videos.

DR. JORDAN PETERSON MAKES HIS ROUNDS

Since when do Canadian professors dominate YouTube and incite protests? On the road with one of the most controversial thinkers of our time

BY **SIMON DUMENCO**

When I arrive on a Sunday morning at the discreet, upscale Manhattan residential hotel where Jordan B. Peterson is staying, I'm relieved to find no trace of anti-Peterson forces. Lately he's been attracting fervent protesters, and at least one of his public appearances this year has been marred by low-level violence.

The 55-year-old Canadian clinical psychologist and University of Toronto psychology professor is in New York to headline the Beacon Theatre, a 2,894-seat neo-Grecian beauty on the Upper West Side. Tonight he'll take the stage in front of a sold-out house of fans who have paid upward of $50 for the privilege. This will be the kickoff of the U.S. leg of his 12 Rules for Life tour, in support of his book of the same name. Since its release in January by Random House, 12 Rules has gone on to top U.S. and various international best-seller charts. As the title suggests, it's a self-help book — but a wide-ranging intellectual romp of a self-help book that capitalises on Peterson's unlikely internet fame: In the five years since he started his own YouTube channel, videos of his lectures have racked up more than 50 million views.

The first thing I ask Peterson, as we sit down to talk in a perfectly appointed private lounge, is how much he worries about protesters. It's only 11 a.m., but he's already in an elegant suit and tie.

"First of all," he says, "what are you going to do? I don't believe that enhancing security makes you more secure. I think that if you set the stage, if you walk around with bodyguards, you look like a target. And so I'm not doing that."

What Peterson is not willing to do is part of what has made him so famous—despised in some quarters, beloved in others.

One of his more notorious refusals involves Bill C-16, a.k.a. An Act to Amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code, which was introduced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's administration and became law in June 2017. Although C-16 is rather vaguely worded in its attempt to advance protections for transgender people, the Ontario Human Rights Commission's interpretation of the law is that "refusing to refer to a trans person by their chosen name and a personal pronoun that matches their gender identity" or otherwise "purposely misgendering" would "likely be discrimination," and thus illegal.

Peterson regards the "misgendering" provision of C-16 as state-mandated "compelled speech" and a wedge-issue victory for socalled social-justice warriors—a pejorative for "identity politics" activists. C-16, Peterson says, "was much, much more ideologically toxic than it appeared on the surface, which I knew because I read all the policy documents." For instance, he says, "the >>

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JAKE CHESSUM**

"WE KNOW THE LEFT CAN GO TOO FAR, BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHEN."

social-justice tribunals in Ontario are exempt from jurisprudential precedent. If you have any sense, that leaves you *speechless*."

"The Ontario government," he continues, "is completely run by social-justice types." (Ottawa, the capital city of Canada, is located in the province of Ontario.) "These people are hell-bent to infiltrate organisations of every sort regardless of the traditions and history of the institution. And our current prime minister, Trudeau, is weak and immature."

He refines the insult: "Uh, attractive, charming, weak and immature, completely under the sway of the ideologues. Trudeau made that manifest with one of his first decisions. When he set up his cabinet in 2015, he made it 50 percent female, despite the fact that only 25 percent of the people elected were female, which first of all means that he did not pick the most qualified people for his cabinet." He adds, "Just make them 50 percent women, because the best way, obviously, to pick cabinet members is on the basis of their genitalia."

Throughout our conversation, Peterson's go-to tack as a professional persuader is to insist that those who disagree with him simply don't have the facts—particularly when it comes to sexual identity. For instance, he cites studies showing that, as he puts it, "almost all the people who are really interested in things are men"—as opposed to women, who are, on average, more interested in people. According to various researchers, this helps explain why men gravitate toward thing-obsessed professions (engineering, architecture) and women toward helping professions (teaching, medicine).

Peterson, of course, is always ready to head off counterarguments at the pass: "You might say, 'Well, those differences are socioculturally constructed,' which is what the postmodern types would claim. But that's not true, because all the data suggests that as a society becomes more egalitarian, the differences between men and women get bigger, not smaller. And no one disputes this data. This isn't some pseudoscience dreamt up by right-wingers."

At another point in our conversation, Peterson makes clear his thoughts about sex and sexuality in regard to this magazine and its founder, Hugh Hefner.

"The problem with Hugh," Peterson says, "was that he thought sex was recreational, essentially." He pauses for effect, then adds, "It's not"—saying "not" with both a rounded Canadian vowel and a scolding tone.

"So what he did was wrong. Now, that doesn't mean it should have been illegal, but he was part of the process by which the sexual revolution occurred. You don't want to pin it on him, because mostly it was driven by the birth control pill, and that's a biological revolution."

This is classic Peterson—the Peterson you meet on YouTube. In addition to the content he posts on his own channel, his fans have posted countless excerpts from his TV interviews and internet Q&As in which he expounds, disapprovingly, on the sexual revolution. In one clip, titled "Jordan Peterson — The Birth Control Pill," he links the pill to the "big '60s experiment" of sexual promiscuity and adds, "It isn't obvious that that went particularly well. It certainly led to the pornographication of our society, which I really think is actually quite dreadful."

At the same time, in 12 Rules he celebrates the male inventors of the tampon, anaesthesia (first used to lessen the pain of childbirth) and, yes, the birth control pill. "In what manner," he writes, "were these practical, enlightened, persistent men part of a constricting patriarchy? Why do we teach our young people that our incredible culture is the result of male oppression?"

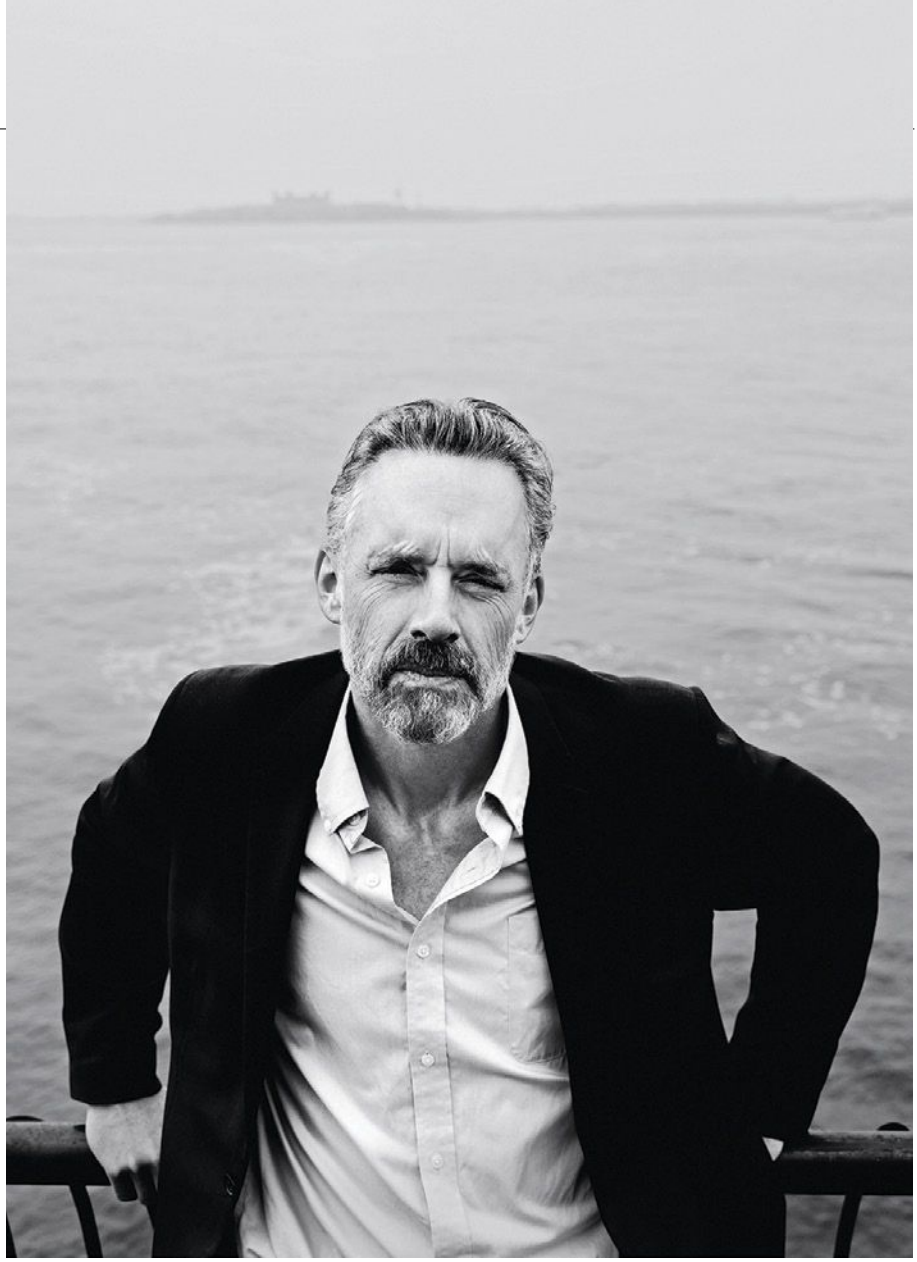
Below a Peterson fan video with the title card "Why Casual Sex Is Wrong," the most up-voted comment is "Jordan Peterson fans don't have casual sex anyway," followed by a pile-on that includes "They don't have any form of sex at all" and "Weak, stupid virgins.

I like pussy. Have fun cleaning your rooms that no one will ever enter."

• • •

Peterson's assorted declarations particularly about gender and identity — are not only controversial in some quarters; they've resulted in his attracting some very controversial supporters. James Sears, head of an unregistered neo-Nazi Canadian political party, admiringly described Peterson as a "Nazi philosopher" in a July 2017 tweet accompanied by an image of two young men posing with Peterson at a speaking engagement; the men are holding a giant flag of Pepe the Frog, the cartoon amphibian that started as an innocuous internet meme but by 2016 had been vaguely appropriated by white supremacists. Grilled by an interviewer for the public Canadian Broadcasting Corporation earlier this year, Peterson said that the shot was hastily taken, that he has been photographed thousands of times with his fans at events and that "the left sees all sorts of things as hate symbols."

When I ask Peterson about extremist



ideologies, including white supremacy, he says, "I've been thinking about the difference between the right and the left, because obviously the right can go too far. If you're on the right, as soon as you start making claims of ethnic or racial superiority, you can put those people in a box and you can say no. On the left, we know the left can go too far, but we don't know when. I think it's because it's a multivariate problem. You can't point to one thing, one policy, one ideological axiom on the left that has the same degree of self-evident toxicity that racial superiority does, though I think equity comes close, the demand for equality of outcome"—i.e., the anti-capitalist idea that we should all more or less end up with the same number of marbles, no matter how we play the game.

The Jordan Peterson who is famous today for positions such as these was shaped by the Jordan Peterson who wrote Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief, which was published in 1999 by British academic press Routledge. He describes the decade and a half he spent working on that tome as a profoundly formative experience: "I was comparing and contrasting two narratives — let's say the narrative that drove the Communists and the narrative that drove the West. I was curious in a postmodern way, I suppose, about whether or not these were just two arbitrary narratives. Because that's a possibility, right? We're all socially constructed. We can organise ourselves according to whatever narrative we want.

"What I figured out was that the narrative of the West is not arbitrary; it's just right. We got it right—that the individual is sovereign. That's the right answer to the problem of tribalism. I don't care if it's tribalism on the left or the right."

Of course, Peterson's certainty about the superiority of the West and the historical triumphs of the patriarchy inevitably rattles those who have problems with certain Western and patriarchal traditions (e.g., structural discrimination). Last October, street fliers were anonymously posted near Peterson's Toronto home that read, in part, "Community Safety Bulletin: Jordan Peterson, a local man teaching at the University of Toronto, has been campaigning against the human rights of women, people of colour, Muslims and LGBT people for over a year.… Due to pressure from Jordan Peterson's alt-right base, the University of Toronto has not taken any action to fire him or disavow his attacks on minority groups."

Those who have dared to criticize Peterson non-anonymously have felt the wrath of the professor's defenders. In February, when Harrison Fluss, a philosophy lecturer at St. John's University and Manhattan College, published a piece titled "Jordan Peterson's Bullshit" ("Jordan Peterson's thought is filled with pseudo-science, bad pop psychology, and deep irrationalism...") in the leftist journal Jacobin, Fluss-bashing, in posts with headlines such as harrison fluss's bullshit, became a cottage industry among Peterson's online followers. And last November, when Tabatha Southey, a columnist at the Canadian news magazine Maclean's, published a piece headlined is jordan peterson the stupid man's smart person?, a similar cottage industry erupted (e.g., is tabatha southey the terrible person's virtuous person?), and Southey was stalked on social media. As she later told The Guardian, "His fans are relentless. They have contacted me, repeatedly, on just about every platform possible."

And so there has been a chilling effect. In March, when the Toronto Star's Vinay Menon profiled the suddenly famous local scholar, he noted, in his largely positive piece, that he couldn't get Peterson's previously public critics to go on the record. (playboy likewise found it challenging to get prominent Peterson critics to comment for this profile.)

• • •

At Peterson's big show this evening, the crowd is overwhelmingly white — which is often the case for any pricey do on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

It skews male. The average age is maybe 30 to 35. Earlier Peterson told me, "It isn't self evident to me that I have a demographic, even if what I'm trying to do is exhort young men to grow the hell up and accept their responsibility."

Onstage, Peterson comes off as a kinder, gentler version of the man I spoke with earlier in the day. He's often funny in a way he isn't when he's in combative, sound-bite-spewing interview mode. He's a born teacher with the stentorian cadence of a self-appointed prophet, but he also has a chuckle that can call to mind Seth Rogen. He speaks without a book in hand and without teleprompters, engagingly stringing together parables. And after a couple of hours, he runs out of time before he can get through even half the rules.

His audience loves him — he gets a standing ovation upon entrance and exit — and it's clear he loves being loved. The frequent applause, the laughter, the murmurs of assent all soften him. Peterson, a lifelong academic who hates academia, who thinks universities are doomed because of their "subsidisation and promotion of crazy radical-left ideologies," is among his people here — here and online, of course. I flash back to the morning at the hotel when I briefly spoke with Tammy, his wife of 29 years. They met in Fairview, a town in the province of Alberta with a population of 2,998 (about 100 more than the seating capacity of the Beacon). At one point she joined her husband and me at our table, and I asked her what it was like being married to a 55-year-old internet celebrity.

Without missing a beat she said, "It's kind of lonely. I mean, if I didn't travel with him, I'd never see him. He's too busy now with the world."

Peterson chimed in: "Part of the stress for Tammy — well, for me but her obviously by proxy — is that for the last two years I've been in a situation where if I ever said anything wrong it would have been essentially fatal. It's a knife's edge. Things have come close to going wrong." He laughed nervously and added, "I've been in a political scandal, of one form or another, on a two-week basis — every two weeks for two years."

Saying exactly what you think — even if what you think can sound radically retrograde, even if it attracts the approval of undesirable tribes — is part of the manly art of being Jordan Peterson. The professor could not care less if you are offended or triggered.

While Tammy was still sitting with us, her husband said, "This whole idea that you should be harmless is just an absolute pathology. You should be as dangerous as you could possibly make yourself, and then you should bring yourself under control. And of course that's right. Of course that's obviously the case. Women don't like weak men, not unless there's something wrong with them."

I turned to Tammy and said, "Well, you married this guy, so I guess ——"

She waited a beat or two and then responded with quiet precision: "I looked at him for a long time before I married him. I made sure he would be somebody who could stand up against life. And when I decided he could, I married him."

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